

2 journos beaten by police during anti-Rampal plant hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One of the policemen was holding him from his front while another grabbed his hair tight before kicking his back mercilessly. On his knees and his shirt torn off, he was surrounded by several policemen and beaten up inside the Shahbagh Police Station, a photograph shows.

This was how cameraperson Abdul Alim was physically assaulted by police while covering yesterday's shutdown enforced by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports.

As Alim's colleague came forward to protect him, police also beat up Ishan Bin Didar, a reporter. Both of them

work for private television channel ATN News. Alim had three stitches on his right eyebrow and Ishan too took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.



Abdul Alim

Several photographs of the police torture went viral on social networks, sparking huge criticism with many demanding punishment of the policemen responsible.

The national committee enforced the eight-hour shutdown from 6:00am yesterday in the capital to press home its demand of scrapping Rampal Power Plant project near the Sundarbans. But police used tear gas, water cannon and charged batons on the demonstrators in the

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ATN News cameraperson Abdul Alim is being assaulted by police inside the capital's Shahbagh Police Station yesterday. He says he was attacked after he had gone there to take footage of policemen beating one of the protesters during yesterday's hartal against the Rampal power plant.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Experts visit wheat fields in Meherpur

Advise farmers on how to contain wheat blast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushiya

Experts from national and international research bodies have visited some wheat fields in Meherpur, affected by wheat blast for second year in a row.

Five hectares of land was affected by the wheat blast in the district's Sadar and Gangni upazilas, they observed and asked the agriculture extension workers to advise farmers to spray fungicides to contain the blast spread.

Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) Dr Mohammad Jalal Uddin, Director General of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) Dr Abul Kalam Azad, Director of Wheat Research Centre (WRC) Dr Naresh Chandra Dev Barma along with the centre's Chief Scientific Officer Dr Paritosh Kumar Malakar and Dr Timothy J Krupnik, agronomist from

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Even a ship full of fertiliser vanishes

FROM PAGE 1

Between 2009 and 2014, some 33,000 tonnes of imported urea worth about Tk 115 crore disappeared from ships. Several importers and at least 30 ships were involved in the scam.

BCIC documents show some traders, including M Trading Shipping Company and Nobab and Company, have long been gobbling up fertilisers from mother vessels.

In March last year, Nobab trafficked 21,500 tonnes of fertiliser from MV Ikan Jebuh that arrived at Chittagong Port. Earlier in 2013-14, the company took 6,600 tonnes from Green Field-1 and over 3,900 tonnes from Barbarof G without BCIC's allocation or approval.

The owner of M Trading left the country in 2015 without handing over about 15,000 tonnes of urea worth around Tk 52 crore, sources have said.

Earlier in 2014, the company secured a work order from the BCIC for supplying 7,800 tonnes of fertilisers in 50kg sacks to warehouses.

But it delivered the product in bulk, a clear breach of the contract.

It is also for this company that the BCIC had to count an additional Tk 5 crore in unloading and labour charges. In February 2015, the company imported 33,000 tonnes of urea but did not unload it from the mother vessel, MV S Atlantic, violating the contract. When the BCIC came to know this in April, it had to hire labourers for carrying those to lighter vessels.

Bangladesh imports fertilisers mainly from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar through Chittagong Port.

Often ships carrying fertilisers are anchored in deep sea that makes it easy for traders and carriers to steal fertilisers from there.

It takes about 45 minutes in speed boats if a BCIC official wants to inspect the fertiliser.

"Surveyors and officers cannot go there because it's very risky. So the syndicate easily steals fertiliser and smuggle from there," said an official,

asking not to be named.

An investigation by The Daily Star has found that a powerful syndicate of traders and some BCIC officials has made off with urea worth hundreds of crores of taka over the last eight years in various ways, including showing them "in transit" for months and even years.

As of December 31 last year, at least 2.58 lakh tonnes of urea valued over Tk 900 crore was in transit and did not reach the buffer warehouses of the state-run BCIC that looks after the production, import and distribution of fertiliser through traders across the country.

LITTLE ACTION

Under the rules, a company must pay demurrages if it fails to ensure quality and right quantity or deliver the fertilisers within 21 days after receiving them from mother vessels.

But traders and carriers hardly face the music because some top BCIC officials of purchase, marketing and management departments are partners in their crimes, according to

documents and sources.

Often, warehouse in-charges issue the MRR (material receipt report) in exchange for money without actually receiving the fertilisers.

Sometimes, BCIC officials recommend actions against the culprits with little results.

In April last year, for example, the BCIC general manager (administration) wrote to the chief of the purchase department to take legal action against Sagar Ship Management Pte Limited for not delivering fertiliser from three ships in time and to the designated warehouses. But nothing was done in this connection, though the company was later barred from participating in tenders for failing to unload fertiliser from another vessel.

Earlier in February, the BCIC suggested taking actions against four of its officials for allowing MS Surma Banijjik Sangstha, a carrier, to transport 10,000 tonnes of fertiliser without approval.

This was a violation of government rules, misuse of power as well

as misconduct and corruption, the letter said.

But no action has yet been taken against the four -- Kamal Uddin Ahmed, former chief of marketing, Nur Nabi, former additional chief manager, Syed Khurshid Hasem, former manager of commercial, and Rezaul Karim, incumbent deputy manager of marketing of the BCIC.

Another probe committee headed by BCIC general manager (finance) found several top officials of its purchase department, Chittagong branch office and marketing department guilty of negligence. The investigation concerned the disappearance of 3,384 tonnes of fertilisers. However, the committee recommended no action against them.

In April last year, the BCIC chairman wrote to the Chittagong branch office to file a criminal case against Nobab and Company for stealing 21,500 tonnes of fertilisers from a mother vessel.

"The company without any allocation or approval took the fertiliser and for this reason a criminal case

can be filed against this local transporter," reads the letter.

In the end, however, the company escaped punishment by returning the fertilisers.

Talking to The Daily Star, its owner Nobab Khan denied that he stole any fertilisers.

Contacted, BCIC Chairman Mohammad Iqbal said they were considering implementing "point-to-point" loading and unloading to avoid misappropriation.

Every year, some 25 lakh tonnes of fertilisers move from one place to another and it's very difficult to keep track of those, he said.

While he admits that a syndicate is controlling and exploiting the fertiliser distribution system, he dismissed any notion that he received any undue financial benefits.

But he has no satisfactory answers as to how the syndicate is able to operate with impunity year after year, including the last two and a half years he has been at the helm of the BCIC.

'ANTI-ISLAM COMMENTS' Two Ansar men held

A CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Police yesterday arrested two Ansar men in Mongla port area of Bagerhat for allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims by sharing a Facebook post with "derogatory comments about Islam".

The arrestees are Ramesh Roy, 25, of Ajojora village under Terokhada upazila of Khulna, and Laxman Mandol, 27, of Darichhola village under Shalikhia upazila of Magura.

They were on-duty at Mongla port. Lutfar Rahman, officer-in-charge of Mongla Police Station, said Ramesh and Laxman allegedly shared a Facebook post on January 23.

The post contained "bad comments about Muslims", and the two also made "offensive remarks on Islam" under the post, the OC said.

The post became viral. When it came to notice of Mongla port officials yesterday, they detained the two and informed police of the matter, the OC said, adding that police then took them to the police station.

Arifa Khatun, an official of Ansar and VDP in Mongla upazila, filed a case against them under the ICT act last night, the OC said. "We are verifying their posts."

DEFYING TRUMP Dutch govt to set up int'l abortion fund

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Netherlands is seeking to set up an overseas abortion fund to counteract Donald Trump's recent ban against funding international groups which give women information about terminations.

Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Lilianne Ploumen for the Dutch government has announced she intends to establish an international fund which would finance projects relating to access for birth control, abortion and women's education, throughout developing countries.

Ms Ploumen announced the plan in reaction to an extensive memorandum signed by Mr Trump to restrict access to information on abortion for women who are in receipt of aid from international development groups.

Snapshot of reality

FROM PAGE 1

a friend), I was curious to know how does it feel to work in a corrupt system without being corrupt. He gave me an interesting insight.

He said, "Well, you journalists keep talking about corruption within the administration. But you never shed light on corruption outside the system."

He explained, "When I visit my village, people want me to donate money for various purposes like construction or renovation of mosques, development of school buildings and cultural programmes. As I don't have any other source of income, I cannot contribute much and sometimes become a laughingstock. People, including my relatives, get very annoyed. They say, 'Come on! You are in the administration. You can make a lot of money.' Learning that I despise bribes, some even say, 'What are you? A fool!'"

Both of us laughed at this point. "It's like they want me to make money. They want me to take bribes. My honesty fails to earn their respect."

As he was getting slightly emotional, I tried to comfort him, saying, "But some people respect you, right?" "Respect!" He now laughed out loud. "Nobody respects honest men anymore. In our society, honest men are nothing but a bunch of losers. This is what our society has become. This is what I meant by corruption outside the system."

"Do you know what happens to honest officers?" he asked me but went on without waiting for my reply, "First of all, we are not only fools. We have to be coward as well. We don't take bribes; that's okay. But if we stand against corruption, we will be punished -- OSD, transfer, no promotion and so on."

"Honesty costs us dearly. This is the reality of the society," he said and sighed. Months after this conversation, I again



PHOTO: COLLECTED

heard of "reality of the society" as I learnt about a man who had to pay for his honesty.

He was an assistant commissioner (jetty examination). He assumed the responsibility on January 15 and the next day, C&F agents went on the rampage at his office, accusing him of "misbehaviour".

They confined him to his office for over three hours, broke his nameplate and hurled stones after he refused to take "speed money", said witnesses.

He could not continue his work that day, according to a report of this newspaper.

With probe still pending into the vandalism and the official's alleged misbehaviour, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) transferred him to a training academy. His transfer order was issued on Monday and he is supposed to join his new workplace tomorrow.

What went wrong on January 16? Talking to a reporter of The Daily Star, a top leader of Chittagong Customs C&F Staff Association said the official is one of the very few who don't take bribes.

"But," he said, "Speed money is exchanged here [customs house] at different levels starting from value

assessment of products to delivery of consignments."

The union leader made a very interesting comment in another media report. Talking to a news portal, he said the officer had to face this situation because of the "reality of our society". "He is a good man. As far as I know, he never takes bribes. But the reality of our society is different."

Ah! The reality of our society! What kind of reality is that? Do we want a society where honesty proves costly for an officer?

We better think about the question seriously.

The assistant commissioner has been "punished". But if we think that it has nothing to do with us, we should go through Inspector Goole's final speech in the famous play "An Inspector Calls".

"We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."

We better learn that lesson quickly.

Tulip resigns as shadow minister

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Hampstead and Kilburn, I represent Hampstead and Kilburn in Westminster. I feel that the most effective place for me to counter Theresa May's hard Brexit is from the back benches."

She added: "On the announcement of the three-line whip on the Article 50 vote, I therefore feel I have no choice but to resign from my frontbench role as shadow minister for early years. I do not support the triggering of Article 50 and cannot reconcile myself to the frontbench position."

At the European Union referendum last year, around 75 per cent of her constituents voted to remain. She also has one of the most marginal seats in the country -- at the 2015 election she won around 1,000 votes more than her closest rival.

Corbyn confirmed the whip decision earlier on Thursday, telling Sky News: "It's clearly a three-line whip. It is a vote on the article 50. We will put out a statement today to our members that we want them to vote for Article 50."

According to news website Business Insider, Thangam Debonnaire, one of

Labour's whips said she will defy the whip if it is imposed.

It is unclear, however, how strictly Corbyn's team will enforce the whip -- with some sources speculating that there could be some flexibility. Historically, any minister or shadow minister who breaks a three-line whip is forced to leave their position on the front bench. "I wouldn't assume anything about the consequences but usual expectations for a three-line whip apply," said one senior Labour source.

BNP wants to see

FROM PAGE 1

Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

The ruling Awami League believes that the BNP would not outright reject the search committee as it wants to participate in the next national elections.

AL Advisory Council member Tofail Ahmed said, "I strongly believe that the BNP will contest the next national elections under the Election Commission to be constituted with the persons recommended by this search committee."

"The BNP shouldn't make the initiative controversial," added Tofail, also the commerce minister.

On Wednesday, President Abdul Hamid formed the six-member search committee, led by Appellate Division Judge Syed Mahmud Hossain, for constituting the EC.

Mahmud also headed the committee that proposed the names of those comprising the incumbent EC led by Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad.

Soon after the publication of the gazette notification on the new committee, the AL welcomed it while the BNP said they were "frustrated and aggrieved."

Seeking anonymity, a BNP standing committee member said they would not outright reject the committee because taking a hardline would not benefit them.

Another member of the standing committee, Amir Khoshru Mahmud Chowdhury, said, "We will give formal reaction to every important event."

He also said they would make sure that all the stakeholders are informed about the search committee's activities.

Replying to a question, he said, "The president has executed the party [AL] decision on the formation of the committee."

In 2012, the BNP held talks with the then president on the caretaker government issue. Later, the party took a hardline and boycotted the January 5 elections. As a consequence, it was left out of parliament for the first time since 1979.

Last year, President Hamid initiated talks with political parties on the EC formation after

Khaleda placed a proposal in this regard.

The BNP proposed forming a search committee for constituting the EC, while the AL and most other parties suggested enacting a law on the EC formation. But the president formed the search committee following the footsteps of his predecessor Zillur Rahman.

A number of BNP leaders yesterday said the president did just the opposite of what they had suggested about formation of the search committee.

On condition of anonymity, a senior BNP leader said the party chief had suggested that the committee should be comprised of five members. But the newly formed committee has six members.

The BNP chairperson also proposed that the convener and members of the search committee would be retired persons but all members of the new committee are serving professionals.

Seeking anonymity, another BNP senior leader said, "It's clear what is going to happen. The chairman of the new search committee was also the chairman of the previous committee that constituted the Rakib-led election commission. Everybody knows about Rakib commission's performance."

"We hoped the government would be accommodative but we saw it is reluctant to give us even minimum space. We have got just the opposite of what we suggested."

Contacted, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the party would brief the media on the matter today at the party's Nayapaltan central office.

At a programme in the capital, A L P r e s i d e n t M e m b e r Mohammad Nasim said the BNP should show a positive attitude towards the search committee.

"Instead of making comments, political parties should wait until the formation of the Election Commission," he said.

Wishing anonymity, a member of the search committee told The Daily Star that the committee's first meeting is likely to be held tomorrow at the Supreme Court Judges' Lounge.