



Demonstrating jute workers being administered saline in front of Platinum Jute Mill's gate in Khulna yesterday, the third consecutive day of their hunger strike.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

JUTE MILL WORKERS' HUNGER STRIKE

One dies in Khulna, 130 fall sick on day 3

STAR REPORT

A jute mill worker died and more than 130 fell sick in Khulna and Rajshahi yesterday, the third consecutive day jute mill workers' hunger strike unto death, to press home their 11-point demand including implementation of national wage commission.

The deceased is Abdur Sattar (48), a worker of spinning section of Platinum Jute Mills in Khulna.

He was participating in the movement at Khalishpur area.

Around noon, he suddenly fell sick due to starvation and dehydration. He was admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital where he died around 5pm, said Sahana Sarmin, president of the mill's workers union.

Talking to The Daily Star, she expressed fears of more deaths if the programme continues.

Workers of state-owned jute mills went on hunger strike at their respective mills premises since Tuesday in Khulna, Jashore, Rajshahi and Chattogram.

The demands include -- payment of regular wages, cancellation of public-private ownership, necessary fund for jute sector, insurance for families of deceased workers, provident fund and gratuity facility

for retired workers and regularisation of temporary workers.

In Khulna and Jashore, at least 100 jute mill workers fell sick from starvation and dehydration as thousands of workers and their families from nine state-owned jute mills in Khulna-Jashore industrial belt continued the strike.

They were admitted to different hospitals, while many unwell workers were given saline intravenously, said Khalilur Rahman, joint secretary of Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) and Non-CBA.

"We bought 225 saline packs for unwell workers on Wednesday afternoon. But the stock has been exhausted and we'll have to buy more," said Bellal Mollick, president of Star Jute Mill Employees Union.

"I have been working for 20 years. But my wage is only Tk 1,600 per week. My husband, who died 40 years ago, was also a jute worker. I cannot run my family with such low wage. We demand a wage increase," said Satara Begum (65), a worker of Platinum Jute Mill.

Around 31,000 workers and their family members have taken position in front of the main gates of their respective mills -- Star, Platinum, Alim, Eastern, Daulatpur, and Khalishpur in Khulna, and JJI and Carpeting in Jashore district since Tuesday.

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'Want to enjoy full rights of a citizen'

Indigenous communities demand separate land commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

In August 2014, Bichitra Tirkī -- leader of the indigenous Orao community and mother of a two-year-old at the time -- was attacked by land grabbers in Chapainawabganj's Gomostapur.

She was gang-raped and beaten mercilessly before all of her 48 bigha land was grabbed.

Apart from legal action, Bichitra walked 60km while carrying her child, demanding a separate land commission to have her land rights established in October that year.

Five years later, she managed to get back 42 bigha of land. Six bigha are still occupied by the land grabbers.

The rape case is still under trial. The demand for a separate land commission remains unmet.

"Our woes are never-ending. As if we, who do not possess money and power, are not eligible to enjoy full rights of a citizen in this country," Bichitra yesterday said, breaking into tears, while describing her plight at a public hearing held on the occasion of Human Rights Day.

"Hundreds of us have left the country. If the government doesn't want us, we too will leave," Bichitra said.

The hearing was organised jointly by three NGOs -- Onogroshor Somaj Unnayan Shangstha, Trinamul Shangstha and Kakon Bohumukhi Unnayan Shangstha -- at Friends' Peak auditorium in Rajshahi city.

Over 200 indigenous men and women from Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Naogaon joined the public hearing.

Speakers described incidents of atrocities that the indigenous communities faced over efforts to grab their land.

These incidents recur due to their lack of political and financial empowerment, they said, demanding establishment of a separate land commission for quick solution to their land-related issues.

Prof Biswajit Chanda of law and land administration department at Rajshahi University, who conducted the hearing, said they would sent the statements to the prime minister.

Land grabbers damaged crops on one acre of land of an indigenous man in Niamatpur upazila for two consecutive years, Nokul Pahan of Naogaon said.

He said they sexually assaulted two indigenous girls at Manda upazila on October 10 and six days later they attacked the girls' house -- leaving seven of the family injured -- for protesting the incident.

Tapas Ekka of Godagari said, after completing graduation, he discovered some deeds which showed that his mother owns a piece of land that another villager was claiming.

"Only after looking into the land records, I learnt one of my uncles gave away the land to my mother. A villager occupied the land after my uncle left the country," he said.

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55 govt agencies working in Dhaka city: World Bank

Number way higher than in Kolkata, Jakarta and Manila

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Empowering local government institutions with city governance system is key to planned urbanisation in the capital and adjoining cities, said Selina Hayat Ivy, mayor of Narayanganj City Corporation.

"As a city corporation authority, we cannot implement the urbanisation master plan, as multiple other government agencies develop schemes without coordination," she said while speaking at a forum organised by the World Bank (WB) at a Dhaka hotel yesterday.

Despite a government direction stating that development activities undertaken by various agencies be coordinated by the city mayor, authorities do not seem to care about the mayor's coordinating role, she said.

Head of various government agencies do not even turn up for coordination meeting, convened by the mayor, apparently because they are accountable to their respective ministers, she said at the forum on 'Transforming Dhaka to a livable, prosperous and resilient megacity'.

Taqsem A Khan, managing director of Dhaka Wasa, said, "Bureaucratic complications and political, business groups with vested interest -- who are opposed to change -- are barriers to making Dhaka a livable city."

Mercy Tembon, country director of World Bank Bangladesh, said, "I cannot agree more to the idea of city government... It is exactly what we need to pursue through a collective platform."

Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam and Gazipur City Mayor Jahangir Alam echoed Ivy, saying that without the coordination of authorities and strict land zoning plan, a planned city is not possible.

Md Tajul Islam, minister for local government, rural development and cooperatives, said that many capital-intensive structural facilities are being implemented in Dhaka without taking into consideration how a modern megacity should be planned and developed.

"It is time we reverse the trend," he said, adding that basic services like employment

opportunities, education and healthcare should be developed in rural areas.

Citing old information, SM Rezaul Karim, minister for housing and public works, said that 66 percent of the buildings in Dhaka city corporation area are either in violation of approved plan or without any approval.

Referring to the statistic, Mayor Ivy said this was a stark pointer that the capital city development regulator Rajuk is busy with impending development schemes, not enforcing regulations.

John Roome, regional director for sustainable development at World Bank, in a presentation said that there are around 55 government agencies working in Dhaka city -- a number way above than that in Kolkata, Jakarta and Manila.

Bangladesh's economic success centres on Dhaka's success, he said.

Dhaka's economic output falls short of what can be expected of a metropolitan city of this size and population. Dhaka's economy generates USD 55 million per

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DHAKA AIRPORT

Construction of third terminal to begin Dec 28

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Construction of the third terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) will begin on December 28, Air Vice Marshal Mafidur Rahman, chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) said yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will formally lay the foundation stone for the construction work in a 30 lakh square metre area, which is scheduled to be completed by 2023, he said at a views-exchange meeting at HSIA.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) on December 10 approved the revised expansion plan for HSIA with an increased cost of Tk 21,399.06 crore.

The third terminal will have a floor space of 2,30,000 square metres, 115 check-in counters, 64 departure and 64 arrival immigration desks.

There will also be a new 63,000 square metre import and export cargo complex and a 5,42,000-square metre apron for 37 aircrafts, among others.

Once the project is implemented, the main airport of the country will be able to provide service to 1.20 crore passengers

every year, said the CAAB boss.

According to the project design, the third terminal will have 12 boarding bridges and conveyor belts each. There will be 20 counters at the third terminal and each counter will have the ability to scan up to 2,000 items of luggage every hour. In addition, there will be parking facilities for 1,120 cars.

According to sources, the passenger handling capacity of the airport is now eight million a year and the number of passengers is expected to reach 14 million by 2025 and 24.8 million by 2035.

In reply to a query, Mafidur said they are buying new machines to get rid of birds flying over the airport, as they might cause danger to aircrafts.

Around 130 domestic and international flights carrying 25,000-30,000 passengers use HSIA every day. There are 26 foreign airlines operating there, officials said. The airport handles around 1.6 crore items of luggage every year, but there are only eight carousels in the two international terminals.

Asked about corruption in various development projects of CAAB, he said, "Stern action will be taken if there is any irregularity in this work."

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Use new tech to curb construction hazards, speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Daily Star and RFL Pipe and Fittings jointly organised a roundtable on "Comprehensive Proposal on Construction Hazard: Creating Awareness and Role of the Stakeholders" at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Speakers at the programme advocated the use of new concrete materials like precast, blocks, and ready-mix to reduce construction activity-related hazards.

Addressing the issue, Buet Prof AFM Saiful Amin spoke of the health hazards posed by unplanned stockpiling of materials like sand, bricks, and cement at construction sites.

He stressed the need to promote ready-mix concrete, which is much more environment-friendly.

Several of the speakers also spoke about ensuring the safety of construction workers.

Abu Sadeq, executive director of Centre for Housing and Building Research, said when it comes to high-rise buildings, the use of precast technology instead of plastering and



PHOTO: STAR

painting from the outside reduces risk for construction workers.

He also said a significant number of construction site accidents go unreported.

In addition, he urged engineers to stop focusing exclusively on cost-effectiveness and consider air and sound pollution while designing a

construction sites.

Moderating the roundtable, The Daily Star Associate Editor Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahedul Anam Khan said it is not uncommon for construction workers to work near public places without any safety net and precautionary notice.

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JnU suspends enrolment in evening course

JNU CORRESPONDENT

Authorities at Jagannath University yesterday directed all departments to halt new enrolment for evening courses till further order.

"We have decided to halt fresh enrolment for evening courses until further notice. However, already-enrolled students will be allowed to finish their courses," JnU Vice Chancellor Mijanur Rahman told The Daily Star.

The university's academic council will take a final decision on the matter at its next meeting, he said.

JnU is the first public university to make the decision, a day after University Grants Commission issued a notice saying all public universities should stop conducting evening courses as they harm the image of the universities.

Including this section, the UGC issued a 13-point directive for the universities.

No outdoor celebration on new year's eve: minister

UNB, Dhaka

The government has imposed restrictions on any outdoor celebrations of the New Year, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told reporters yesterday.

"All arrangements will be made to maintain law and order on the 31st night. No concert or musical show will be allowed at open spaces in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country," he said after a meeting at the secretariat, discussing security preparations for Christmas and New Year celebrations.

On the night, all bars will remain closed for 24 hours commencing from 6pm. Additionally, carrying firearms will be banned from 4pm on December 31 to 6pm on January 1.

There will also be widespread anti-narcotic checks, he added.

City dwellers have been urged to refrain from using Vuvuzela and fireworks while celebrating the New Year.

The authorities have also taken special measures to ensure safe New Year celebrations on the Dhaka University campus.

"No outsider will be allowed to enter the campus after 8pm. Besides, no vehicle, except those bearing university stickers, will enter the area during the period," the minister said.

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Enact anti-discrimination act now

Members of marginalised communities tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should enact the draft Anti-Discrimination Act-2018 as soon as possible, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

Nagorik Uddyog and Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) jointly organised the roundtable on "Why the anti-discrimination act needs to be passed soon?" at The Daily Star Centre.

Aleya Begum Lily, general secretary of Bangladesh Sex Workers' Network, said although registration of a sex worker is preceded by procurement of a license through affidavit from a first-class magistrate, they are still evicted from their house without a single day's notice.

Ivan Ahmed Kotha, president of Shocheton Shilpi Shangha -- an organisation working for rights of the Hijra community -- said although she has been leading her organisation since 1999 and proved herself as a successful person, she still has

to face discrimination inside her family.

Ali Imran, a representative of the Urdu-speaking community living in the capital, said when they try to get a passport, they face challenges in verification process, as officials treat them as non-Bangladeshis, despite the 2008 HC verdict that gave them the right of being citizens of Bangladesh.

M Robiul Islam, deputy director of National Human Rights Commission, said he was skeptical about the latest update of the draft act.

Three lawmakers -- Lutfun Nesa Khan, Barrister Shamim Haider Patwary and Md Israfil Alam -- spoke at the event. Israfil said since the objectives of minority commission and the anti-discrimination act are similar, only one can be implemented, and he would prefer the law.

BDERM President Moni Rani Das appreciated government initiatives for left-behind communities, but said there must be proper monitoring to ensure that the beneficiaries can avail the opportunities.

DEATH OF CHINESE NATIONAL

Wife files murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Motive behind the murder of the Chinese national Jianhui Gao -- whose body was found in Banani on Wednesday -- remains a mystery, with investigators making little progress.

"We found a black mark on his neck, but are yet to find any clue about the killers," Sudip Chakrabarty, deputy commissioner (Gulshan) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told this newspaper yesterday.

Doctors conducted autopsy of Gao at Dhaka Medical College morgue yesterday. He was strangled to death, said sources at the morgue.

Meanwhile, victim's wife Zhang Shu Hong filed a murder case with Banani Police Station against unnamed accused, after flying in from China yesterday.

"Gao always had an interpreter with him, because he did not speak English. That is why he used to avoid meeting people unless necessary," he said.

Police said Gao's business partner is currently in China. She is set to arrive in Dhaka today, he added.

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