

Jute workers defiant

Protest enters day four; seven on fast-unto-death lands in hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Many jute mill workers in Khulna and Jashore fell sick as they continued their fast-unto-death for the third day yesterday to press home their 11-point demand.

Doctors at Khulna Medical College Hospital said seven workers were admitted to the hospital since early yesterday.

However, workers claimed that at least 100 protesters became ill. Of them, around 30 were admitted to different local hospitals and clinics.

Protesters said many workers were suffering from dehydration and cold-related illness.

Workers of eight state-run jute mills in Khulna and Jashore industrial belt have been staging the protest on the BDC road in Khulna city, Atr industrial area and Rajhat area near Khulna-Dhaka highway since 3:00pm on Sunday.

Workers sat in front of the main gates to Star, Platinum, Alim, Eastern, Daulatpur, and Khalishpur jute mills in Khulna, and Jashore Jute Industries in Jashore under the banner of CBA and non-CBA Sangram Parishad. Their family members also joined the demonstration.

Production at those mills came to a halt due to the demonstration. However, Carpeting Jute Mills in Jashore was operating at partial production, said workers.

The workers' demands include implementation of 2015 wage commission award, timely payment of wages, cancellation of public-private ownership initiative, allocation of necessary fund for the jute sector, insurance for families of deceased

workers, ensuring payment of provident fund and gratuity accumulation for retired workers and regularisation of jobs of temporary workers.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Sarder Abdul Hamid, convener of Collective Bargaining Agents (CBAs) and non-CBA Sangram Parishad, said workers showed extreme patience during their movement, but they failed to draw the attention of the government to their demands.

He alleged that Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) was conspiring to destroy the jute sector by shutting the state-run jute mills.

"The BJMC is trying to create such a situation that the workers are forced to quit their jobs. Around one-third of the workers of the nine state-run jute mills have already left their jobs," said Hamid, also the president of Alim Jute Mills Employees Union.

Presently, some 31,000 permanent and temporary workers are employed at the eight jute mills.

Khalilur Rahman Sumon, former president of Platinum employees' union, said a worker of Khalishpur jute mills was admitted to the ICU of Khulna Medical College Hospital on Monday night after he fell sick.

"The situation may get worse from tonight [last night] as over 50 hours have passed since the beginning of the fast-unto-death," said Khalilur.

He said they had to resume their protest as the authorities failed to keep their promise on meeting the demands.

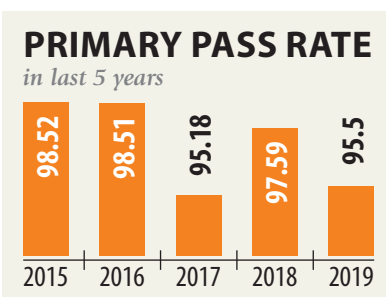
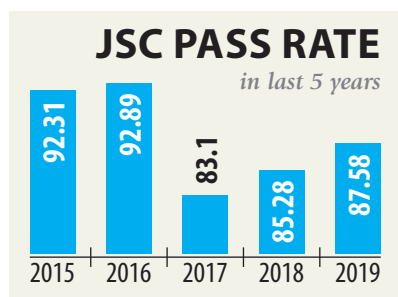
The workers had postponed their protest programme on December 14 following assurance from Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labour and employment, that their demands would be met.



Surrounded by her smiling friends, an excited student at the Viqarunnisa Noon School & College calls her other friends to tell them how well she did in her JSC exams yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Girls do it again



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exams increased by 2.07 percentage point this year. This year the pass rate in the JSC and JDC examinations is 87.90 per cent, which was 85.83 per cent last year.

The pass rate in PECE came down to 95.50 percent this year, a 2.01 percent decrease from last year's 97.59 percent. While the number of GPA 5 achiever dropped to 3,26,088 this year, a 42,105 decrease from last year's 3,68,193.

Primary and Mass Education State Minister Zakir Hossen said that results can see up and down someone cannot expect improvement every year.

Primary and mass education secretary Akram-Al-Hossain opined that script of this year's candidates were evaluated by the teacher of other upazila it could be reason of slide in result.

GIRLS OUTPERFORM BOYS

A total of 13,29,926 girls and 11,24,225 boys sat for the PECE examination this year. The pass rates for girls and boys are 95.37 and 95.61 percent respectively.

Of them, as many as 1,84,637 girls obtained GPA-5 while 1,41,451 boys got distinction.

It was a similar picture in the JSC examination.

Some 11,94,005 girls and 10,27,586 boys took the test and 88.33 percent girls and 86.72 percent boys passed the exam.

As many as 44,918 girls achieved GPA-5 against 31,829 boys.

"It is really positive that girls are doing well in the exams. Such results prove that the investment and initiatives for girls' education is bringing results," educationist Rasheda K Choudhury told The Daily Star.

"Government initiatives like stipend and other facilities as well as more parents becoming favourable toward girls' education are some reasons for girls doing well," Rasheda, also the executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said.

PECE This year, some 24.54 lakh fifth grade students were tested on six subjects which began on November 17 across the country. Of them, 23.44 lakh students passed. Students must pass the exams to enrol the sixth grade.

Primary and Mass Education State Minister Zakir Hossen announced the results formally at a crowded press conference around 1:00pm at his secretariat office in the capital.

Students of the primary section of government high schools have highest pass rate - 99.55 percent, followed by PII attached schools with 99.16 percent. Students of Ananda School performed the worst with a 74.37 percent pass rate.

Barishal board topped the list among all eight divisions, with a 96.93 percent pass rate. On the other hand, with a 91.94 percent pass rate, Sylhet was at the bottom.

Children to be groomed

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modernise the education system of the country.

"Through this education system, everyone will grow up with greater mental strength. We want to develop our education system to that level. We're moving towards that direction gradually," Sheikh Hasina said.

The prime minister said the government is putting emphasis on vocational education so that students of the country could flourish their talents properly, which will be beneficial for the country, too.

She said the government after assuming office emphasised upgrading the education system and it has already formulated an education policy. "It's not possible for a nation to live with dignity without proper education."

Hasina also mentioned that the government has given special

attention to games and sports and that is why it is building a mini-stadium in each upazila of the country in phases.

Hasina said millions of people have made their supreme sacrifice for the independence of the country and their sacrifice must not go in vain. "We want to build the country as a developed one and for that what we need most is to develop our future generation with proper education."

She said Bangladesh has been liberated with an ideal in front of the nation. "And that is building such a society where there'll be no discrimination...it'll be free from poverty... it'll be developed and prosperous one," she said.

She said the government wanted to build the future generation in such a way so that they could become proficient in all types of education.

Gazipur stood first among all districts with a pass rate of 99.14 percent, while Faridpur stood last with 85.96 percent. All students from Daulatkhan upazila of Bhola passed the exams.

Moreover, a total of 4,471 children with special needs took the exams and over 89.90 percent of them passed.

When asked about demand of dropping terminal exams after class V, Zakir said that they are not thinking about the cancellation of any exam. "This exam is helping students to be more competitive and is helping them flourish their talents," he said.

"But we are thinking about to bring some changes in the exam system," he added.

JSC While announcing the results at a press conference around 11:30am at her ministry's conference room, Education Minister Dipu Moni yesterday said that 87.58 percent students passed the JSC exam. A total of 22.21 lakh students, under nine education boards across the country, took part in the exams that began on November 1.

A significant jump of 12.97 percent in the Sylhet board and students' better performance in key subjects like English and mathematics pushed up the overall pass rate in JSC exams. Officials said that the performance of students in English and maths always makes a difference in public exam pass rates.

This year 92.79 percent students of the Sylhet board passed the exam, while 79.82 percent students passed the exam in 2018.

Contacted, Board Controller of Examinations Kabir Ahmed said that students have performed well in English and mathematics subject because guardian and teachers took better care and provided proper guidance to the students.

Last year, 85.42 percent students of the Sylhet board passed English and

this year, it increased to 96.38 percent. Last year 93.59 percent students of the same board passed the mathematics test and this year, it increased to 95.90 percent

In the previous year, 91.07 and 84.74 percent students in Chattogram board passed English and maths respectively, and those rose to 91.95 and 91.30 percent this year.

For the third year in a row, Barishal board topped among all boards, with a pass rate of 97.05 percent, while Dhaka board was in the bottom with a pass rate of 82.92 percent.

When asked about the results, Dhaka education board chairman Ziaul Haque said that students of other districts outside the capital performed poorly, which affected the entire board result.

This year, 3,400 schools had cent percent students passing against last year's 3,042 such school. No students passed from 14 institutions, against 20 of 2018.

A total of 432 Bangladeshi students sat for the tests in nine foreign exam centres and 419 of them passed, and 53 of them got GPA 5s.

At the briefing, Dipu Moni urged all not to put too much pressure on students to get GPA 5 only. "Giving extra importance and running after GPA 5 is huge burden on the children. Please refrain from it."

She said the government is carrying out various transformations to bring a qualitative change in the education sector, which will be a supplement to the efforts of achieving the target of Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030.

Dipu Moni and Zakir Hossen both handed over the results to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina earlier in the morning.

Following the announcement, the results were available in schools, on education board websites and were also sent through SMS on mobile phones.

Ebtadayee, JDC pass rates slip

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Madrassa students did not do as well as they did last year in terms of achieving the much-sought after Grade Point Average 5 (GPA-5) in Ebtadayee Education Completion Examination and Junior Dakhil Certificate Examinations.

The results, which were published yesterday, also showed that pass rate in Ebtadayee examination decreased while success rate increased in JDC exam.

Education minister Dipu Moni and primary and mass education state minister Zakir Hossen announced the results of JDC and Ebtadayee examination respectively at their offices in the secretariat.

This year, 3,04,178 students took part in the Ebtadayee Education Completion Examination after fifth grade, which is equivalent to Primary Education Completion Examination.

The pass rate in the Ebtadayee exam came down to 95.96 percent this year, a 1.73 percent decrease from that of last year's 97.69 percent.

While the number of GPA-5 achievers dropped to 11,877 this year, a decrease of 387 from last year's 12,264.

For the third year in a row, Rajshahi saw the highest pass rate among all divisions with a 97.81 percent pass rate, while Sylhet was at the bottom with 91 percent pass rate. A total of 83 upazilas had 100 percent pass rate.

This year, 3,80,442 students took part in the JDC exams after eight

Dhaka to Ctg

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the electric train.

HIGH-SPEED TRAIN

Work for the detailed design of the project is expected to be completed in April next year, said project director Md Quamrul Ahsan.

"We will then prepare a DPP [Develop and Prepare Project Proposal] for the project. Works for managing funds will go on simultaneously," he told The Daily Star on December 24. He hoped to place the project before the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecne) by 2020.

The consultants proposed a fare of Tk 10 per kilometre per person in their reports. On that basis, train fare from Dhaka to Chattogram is likely to be around Tk 2,000, said Quamrul.

"However, this will be further analysed and is not final."

Ticket fare for a Shovon chair from Dhaka to Chattogram is Tk 345 while an AC chair is Tk 656. Flights from Dhaka to Chattogram range between Tk 2,500 to 3,000.

In total, there are six stations on the proposed route -- Dhaka, Narayanganj, Cumilla, Feni, Pahartali and Chattogram, said Quamrul.

At the beginning, the railway is planning to operate around 40 pairs of trains, he said, adding that the number of trains will increase with passenger demand.

In March 2017, the planning minister approved the "Feasibility Study and Detail Design for Construction of Dhaka-Chattogram via Cumilla/Laksham High-Speed Railway Project."

The consortium of China Railway Design Corporation of China and Mazumder Enterprise of Bangladesh conducted the feasibility study and are currently preparing the detailed design at a cost of Tk 110.16 crore.

Among four options, the 227.3km Dhaka-Narayanganj-Cumilla-Feni-Chattogram route was recommended and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved it along with the technical standards of the railway.

The total estimated cost of the project from Dhaka to Chattogram would be about \$1.4 billion, which would be Tk 96,752 crore (\$1=Tk 84.87).

Of the 668.24 hectares of land required for the project, Bangladesh Railway has to acquire 464.2 hectares.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in March this year, directed the authorities concerned to extend the route down to Cox's Bazar.

If the route is extended to Cox's Bazar, it will be the single largest government project ever in terms of project cost, beating Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant's Tk 1,13, 092 crores, according to Bangladesh Railway officials.

The high-speed railway will be double-track and mostly elevated. It would be a ballast-less track and for the first time in Bangladesh Railway, it will be operated through electric traction.

"We are now preparing a DPP to carry out a feasibility study for the extended route," said Quamrul Ahsan.

Currently, Bangladesh Railway operates 360 passenger trains through its 3,000km network across the country, divided into eastern and western zones.

Although the number of passengers keeps increasing, the railways continues to incur huge financial losses every year. **'HIGHLY AMBITIOUS' PROJECT** Transport expert Prof Hasib Mohammed Ahsan said the government may have a plan to introduce bullet trains considering economic growth, but its move should be consistent with the capacity of Bangladesh Railway.

"Where we don't yet have the capacity to operate a train at 100km/hr, we are going to operate a 300km/hr train.

It is a huge jump, but our approach needs to be gradual," Prof Hasib, also a former director of the Accident Research Institute (ARI) at Buet, told The Daily Star on December 25.

The authorities should first opt for electric trains instead of high-speed trains, he said, adding, "If we can't improve our overall performance, it [the new project] will create management and operational problems."

Another transport expert, Prof Shamsul Hoque, said construction of a chord line from Dhaka to Laksham in Cumilla would also reduce the Dhaka-Chattogram route length by around 99km from the existing 320km.

A project in this regard has been in discussion for decades but has not been green-lit yet. Instead of introducing high-speed trains, the government should build the chord line first.

"I have doubts about the viability of a high-speed train within this 'short distance'. Besides, I don't think the railway has the capacity for such a project," the former ARI director told this newspaper on December 25.

The high-speed train will also face challenges once the Dhaka-Chattogram expressway, now at the planning stage, is operational, as people will choose "door to door" connectivity buses rather than station-based fixed schedule trains, he added.

"I think this is a premature and 'highly ambitious' project and the authorities should reconsider before proceeding with it," he said.

Asked why they are planning to introduce the high-speed train instead of the more "cost-effective" electric train after the construction of a chord line from Dhaka to Laksham, Quamrul Ahsan said there are around 350 level crossings on the proposed high-speed railway route between Dhaka to Chattogram.

Access control or grade separation (where trains and road vehicles run on separate levels) are essential to increase train speeds in a densely populated country like Bangladesh, he said.

Train speeds of more than 100km/hr at the same grade with roads and without access control may have severe consequences in regard to accidents, he said.

Quamrul said the proposed high-speed railway will be operated by electric traction and is mostly elevated so access control is ensured. It will require less land acquisition and has less impact on agriculture, drainage, and the environment, he added.

Contacted, Railways Ministry Secretary Mofazzel Hossain said that although several countries have expressed interest in funding the project, the ministry has not yet received a formal proposal.

Asked about the reservations of experts over the project, he told The Daily Star on December 28, "The government has already taken on projects to build the metro rail, a nuclear power plant, and an underwater tunnel. So, this project can in no way be labelled a high ambitious one."

Bangladesh has set a goal to establish itself as a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed and prosperous country by 2041, he continued, adding, "Considering our economic growth and people's demands, we are going ahead with this project."

According to OMIO, an internationally popular travel website, the world's fastest bullet train is operated in China at the highest speed of 350kph.

In Japan and France, the highest speed of the bullet train is 320kph while its 310kph in Spain and 300kph in Germany.

JSC RESULTS COMPARISON

BOARDS	PASS RATE 2019	PASS RATE 2018	GPA 5 2019	GPA-5 2018
Dhaka	82.72	83.19	18,953	22,334
Rajshahi	94.10	94.57	16,478	14,638
Cumilla	88.80	86.99	6,131	3,742
Jashore	91.08	84.61	9,755	7,256
Chattogram	82.93	81.52	6,041	5,231
Barishal	97.05	97.05	4,948	4,906
Sylhet	92.79	79.82	3,773	1,698
Dinajpur	83.92	81.63	6,765	6,303
Mymensingh	87.21	--	3,903	--
TOTAL	87.58	85.28	76,747	66,108

DIVISION WISE PECE RESULTS

DIVISION	PASS RATE 2019	PASS RATE 2018
Dhaka	96.18	98.25
Rajshahi	95.05	97.07
Khulna	95.80	98.05
Chattogram	96.92	98.11
Barishal	96.93	97.72
Sylhet	91.94	94.76
Rangpur	95.37	98.20
Mymensingh	92.21	96.30
AVERAGE	95.50	97.59

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