

BARAPUKURIA Coal miners stage demo for arrears

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

Miners of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited and their family members staged a protest in Dinajpur's Parbatipur upazila yesterday demanding arrears and reinstatement.

Around 700 miners who remained unemployed for the last two years took part in the protest.

BCMCL Miners and Workers Union President Rabiul Islam said the workers became unemployed amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Besides, arrears of eight months of some of the miners are still owed.

"We, the miners, extracted coal for BCMCL risking our lives for the last 15 years. Now we are starving with our families," he said.

The miners vowed to continue their protest until their two-point demand is not met, he said.

BCMCL sources said the miners were employed by CMC-XMC Consortium, a Chinese company contracted for coal production and maintenance.

On March 26, 2020, the Chinese company sent the miners on mandatory leave after the government imposed a lockdown, but never called them back.

The unemployed miners were protesting for the last 10 days and holding different programmes demanding their jobs be given back.

They even submitted copies of a memorandum to BCMCL, CMC-XMC Consortium and the energy ministry on April 24.

"We are expecting a solution, but nobody contacted us," said Rabiul.

BCMCL Managing Director Mohammad Kamruzzaman said no arrears were due to the miners.

BCMCL Miners and Workers Union General Secretary Abu Sufiyan said, "We will be on the streets even on the Eid day with our family members."



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a meeting with Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Don't test our patience

Warns Russia as Biden proposes \$33b package for Ukraine; UN chief condemns 'absurdity' of war

AGENCIES

Russia yesterday warned the West that there would be a tough military response to any further attack on Russian territory, accusing the United States and its key European allies of openly inciting Ukraine to assault Russia.

Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine has killed thousands of people, displaced millions more and raised fears of the most serious confrontation between Russia and the United States since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

US President Joe Biden yesterday was to propose a huge \$33 billion package for arming and supporting Ukraine in its war against Russia, as well as using luxury assets stripped from Russian oligarchs to compensate the battered pro-Western country.

The bulk of the proposed \$33 billion package will be "\$20 billion in military and other security assistance. This means weapons and ammunition flowing to the Ukrainian people," a senior US official said.

A further \$8.5 billion in economic aid will "help the government of Ukraine respond to the immediate crisis," while some \$3 billion is proposed to fund humanitarian assistance and address the global food supply price shock resulting from Russia's onslaught against Ukraine, a

major wheat exporter.

Two months since Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia has in recent days reported what it says are a series of attacks by Ukrainian forces on Russian regions which border Ukraine, and has warned that such attacks risk a significant escalation.

Ukraine has not directly accepted responsibility but says the incidents are payback, while Russia has taken umbrage at statements from Nato-member Britain that it is legitimate for Ukraine to target Russian logistics.

"In the West, they are openly calling on Kyiv to attack Russia including with the use of weapons received from Nato countries," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters in Moscow. "I don't advise you to test our patience further."

Russia's defence ministry said on Tuesday that if such attacks continued then Moscow would target decision-making centres in Ukraine, including those where it said Western advisers were helping Kyiv.

Zakharova cast Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as a puppet of the West, who was being used by the United States to threaten Russia.

The United States has ruled out sending its own or Nato forces to Ukraine but Washington and its European allies have

supplied weapons to Kyiv such as drones, Howitzer heavy artillery, anti-aircraft Stinger and anti-tank Javelin missiles.

Russian President Vladimir Putin casts such large arms shipments as part of a broader plan by the United States and its allies to destroy Russia - and has promised that it will never succeed, according to a Reuters report.

Ukraine says it is fighting an imperial-style land grab and that Putin's claims of genocide are nonsense.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday visited sites of alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine, decrying war as "an absurdity in the 21st century" and urging Russia to cooperate with an international investigation into atrocities.

Germany's Bundestag lower house of parliament overwhelmingly approved a petition on support for Ukraine backing the delivery of weapons including heavy arms to the country to help it fend off Russian attacks.

Nearly 5.4 million Ukrainians have fled their country so far, the United Nations said yesterday, with more than 55,000 leaving in the past 24 hours.

Women and children account for 90 percent of those who have fled abroad, with men aged 18 to 60 eligible for military call-up unable to leave.

A self-serving, dubious initiative

FROM PAGE 1
2019, when the proposal was made to the Chattogram Development Authority (CDA).

In exchange for a share of the proceeds from the sales of the structures in the islet, the consortium would build a 20.5 kilometre metro rail line connecting the port city's train station and the airport costing \$2.2 billion for free - a rare offer that indeed sounds too good to be true and raises a plethora of questions.

The document does not specify which would come first: the metro rail or the smart city.

CDA - whose jurisdiction is on 1,152 square kilometres of the Chittagong Metropolitan Area, with its boundary on the west ending at the Bay of Bengal - is fully on board with the unusual plan.

Section 6 of the Chattogram Development Authority Act-2018 outlines the power and function of CDA and it does not mention anything about the sea but about the existing land mass of the country.

This raises the question of whether the CDA went beyond its limits when it sent the proposal to the ministry of housing and public works for placing before the parliamentary standing committee.

That was done at the meeting on February 22, where the committee endorsed it, in a move that walks a tight rope on the parliamentary body's mandate.

As per article 76 (1) of the constitution, a parliamentary standing committee is supposed to

examine draft bills and other legislative proposals, review the enforcement of laws and propose measures for such enforcement.

The committee will also investigate or inquire into the activities or administration of the ministry under its jurisdiction and perform any other function assigned to it by the parliament.

But the section 248 of the rules of procedure of the parliament states the committee can "examine, if it deems fit, any such other matter as may fall within its jurisdiction and to make recommendations".

It is this grey area that the committee appears to have leveraged to recommend the proposal, which, according to Hossain, was not vetted by the law ministry, the foreign ministry or any of the security agencies and did not have an EIA.

The consortium's offer to build the metro has thrown a curveball to the road transport and bridges ministry, which is in advanced talks with the Korea International Cooperation Agency for conducting a feasibility study for establishing a mass rapid transit network in the port city, according to ministry officials.

Besides, the building of metro rail or public transport facilities falls under the jurisdiction of the road transport and highway division, which raises the question of the CDA's involvement of any kind in the port city's mass rapid transit network plan.

"It's a very good proposal and Bangladesh will surely benefit - I will write to the prime minister requesting

her to accept it," Hossain told The Daily Star recently.

When prodded on his family's involvement in the project, he said: "It's not my family but The Peninsula Chittagong, a public limited company, that came on board as a partner."

Hossain, who previously helmed the ministries of civil aviation and tourism and housing and public works in two separate terms, said his holdings in the company, which was listed with both the bourses in 2014, are less than 5 percent.

The shareholding position report submitted by the company to the Dhaka Stock Exchange - and is available on the company's website - indicates otherwise: he had 7.44 percent stakes in The Peninsula Chittagong at the end of March.

Not just that, most of the shares of the company, which operates an upscale hotel in the port city since 2006, belong to Hossain and his family.

As on March 31, Hossain and his family members' holdings in the company were 42.8 percent: Rahman (3.1 percent), his wife Mirka (2.57 percent), Sultana (5.05 percent), Mustafa Tahseen Arshad (12.32 percent), his wife Bilkis (7.7 percent) and his brother (4.62 percent).

"Most of the shares belong to the general public. Several lakh shareholders of this public limited company are involved with this project," he added.

As on March 31, the general public held 34.01 percent stakes in the company, institutional investors - including the state-owned Investment

Corporation of Bangladesh - 15.96 percent and foreign investors 0.2 percent, according to the DSE.

Discussion on a project in a parliamentary body whose chief has involvement in it is tantamount to conflict of interest, said Nizam Ahmed, an expert on parliamentary affairs.

"Although it is not unlawful from the legal side, it is unethical from the point of ethics," said Ahmed, a former professor of the University of Chittagong's department of public administration.

Hossain though remained defiant.

"Those who are finding a conflict of interest are misinterpreting the situation. We are a land-hungry country. We will not get land from either India or Myanmar. We will have to manage by reclaiming land from the sea. Why should I not accept this when I don't have money and when I am getting an MRT for free?"

His son Rahman though was circumspect about the proposal.

"We have forged a partnership with two Chinese companies mainly to see whether the project is feasible or not. We are working as a sales, marketing and promotion partner," he told The Daily Star recently.

The Peninsula Chittagong would invest in the project if it is found to be viable.

"We are assessing the market. It is a strategic partnership for us as we already operate hotels in this part of the country," said Rahman, who is also the managing director of Sayaman Beach Resort in

Cox's Bazar.

The feasibility study for the project is "almost done", he said.

Asked about the Chinese companies' role in the project, he said: "They will work as a developer - they will get proceeds from the sales of structures and services."

The area selected for development is a dead end of the sea and it is not the main channel, according to Kazi Hasan Bin Shams, the chief engineer of CDA.

"The width would be 2 to 2.5 km and the length around 50 km. The depth of the sea in this area is not that much."

The reclaimed land would belong to the land ministry but it would be handed over to the CDA, which would then develop it with the consortium.

The consortium will build the metro rail as it is imperative to make the smart city viable, Shams said.

"China will provide the money but we will be the owner of the smart city," he said, adding that the reclamation was not part of the CDA's master plan.

The CDA's master plan is now being reworked to accommodate the smart city, which would be close to the Bay Terminal.

When quizzed whether the sea falls under the jurisdiction of the CDA or whether it has any mandate for projects offshore, he was elusive.

"Any project in the Chattogram area - be it public or private - requires the CDA's permission. This is why they have sent the proposal to us."

Schoolteacher dies in kitchen fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Moulvibazar*

A school head teacher died and her husband was injured in a fire caused by a leaking gas cylinder at their home in Moulvibazar's Barlekha upazila early yesterday.

The deceased is Rubia Begum, 42, headmaster of Surikandi Government Primary School in the same upazila.

Barlekha fire service officials said gas accumulated in the kitchen of Rubia's home after a cylinder leaked. As she tried to light a gas stove around 3:00am, a fire spread in the kitchen, leaving her burnt.

The schoolteacher died on the spot. Her husband Abdul Karim, acting headmaster of Kandigram Mihari Government Primary School, suffered burns as he tried to save her. He was admitted to a private hospital in Sylhet.

Man held for keeping Quran inside temple

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

Police arrested a man for keeping a copy of the holy Quran at Uttar Palpara Kali Mandir in Patuakhali's Bauphal upazila early yesterday.

The arrestee is Idris, 55, of Nalua village in Barishal's Bakerganj upazila.

Quoting locals, police said a young man named Sanjay Paul saw Idris coming out of the temple around 3:30am.

Enquired why he entered the temple, Idris said he went there to offer prayers.

Asked why he would offer prayers at the temple despite being a Muslim, he tried to run away. Some locals, however, managed to catch him.

Locals later found an abandoned shopping bag with a Quran inside it in the temple. At one stage, Idris admitted that he made a mistake by keeping the Quran there, said police.

Law enforcers arrested Idris from there around 4:00am and took him to Bauphal Police Station. A case was filed with the police station in this regard.

1 killed, 20 hurt in Faridpur clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Faridpur*

An elderly man was killed and at least 20 other people, including eight cops, were injured in a clash between two rival groups in Jadunandi village of Faridpur's Saltha upazila on Wednesday night over establishing supremacy.

The deceased was identified as Nannu Fakir, 65, of Jadunandi village.

Locals said there was a longstanding rivalry between Mizanur Rahman, chairman of Rupapat Union Parishad in Boalmari, and Kamruzzaman Mollah alias Kayum Mollah, a resident of Jadunandi village and also the president of Rupapat Baman Chardra High School managing committee, over establishing dominance.

Followers of Mizanur beat up one Mehedi, 14, of Jadunandi village, on Wednesday evening when he went to Rupapat bazar. Later at night, supporters of both the groups clashed, leaving 21 people, including Nannu, wounded.

The injured were taken to Maksudpur Upazila Health Complex in Gopalganj, where an on-duty doctor declared Nannu dead.

This newspaper could not reach Mizanur and Kayum for comments as their phones were found switched off.