



Holding an umbrella tight amid rain, a child along with his parents heads back home, making sure that their geese and goats follow suit. This photo was taken from Khulna's Dacope upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

BCL leader 'beats' RU student

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Rajshahi University student was allegedly beaten by a Chhatra League leader in a dormitory on Friday.

Shamsul Islam, a fourth-year Economics department student who resides in Matihar Hall, accused Vashkar Saha, general secretary of the hall unit BCL, of beating him after confining him to a room.

Shamsul alleged that Vashkar and some BCL men also snatched around Tk 20,000 from him while he was being beaten. He submitted a written complaint to the proctor and student affairs adviser of the university.

In the complaint, he said he bears his educational expenses by servicing mobile phones in his room. On August 15, Vashkar called him and demanded some money, which he refused to pay.

On Friday afternoon, the BCL leader asked him to meet him in his room.

When he went there, three BCL men -- including Vashkar -- confined him to the room and snatched the money from his wallet at knife point. He was beaten with rod and cricket stumps when he said he would complain to the university authorities.

Contacted, Vashkar

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

Was this really a win for tea workers?

Protest called off after Tk 25 pay hike; workers still worried about making ends meet

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

"Today, I protest so that I don't die out of hunger. It's a protest for our lives, our survival and our rights."

This was what Agni Banik, a permanent tea worker based in Moulvibazar, had to say before the countrywide protest was called off, after the prime minister's directive to raise their daily wage from Tk 120 to Tk 145.

Moulvibazar Deputy Commissioner Mir Nahid Ahsan relayed this decision to everyone yesterday at a meeting held at



the Office of the Department of Labour at Sreemangal, Moulvibazar.

Hearing this, tea-worker leaders called off the strike for the time being.

"The Prime Minister's Office contacted us. Based on the prime minister's assurance, the tea workers have accepted this wage and will join work from tomorrow [today]," said DC Nahid.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



Workers of 166 tea estates across the country, including those in Sylhet and Chattogram, refrained from working from August 13, demanding a hike in daily wage from the existing Tk 120 to Tk 300.

So, how will a pay hike of Tk 25, a small fraction of the demanded raise, be of any benefit, that too at a time when prices of essentials keep on rising?

"The price of per kilo rice is now Tk 60, while per litre soybean oil costs Tk 200. It takes Tk 150 to buy 12 eggs. And yet, we're only getting a paltry daily wage. How do we survive like this?" asked Agni.

Agni, who had been demonstrating in front of

Malinichhara Tea Garden, also mentioned how families of workers like her suffered during their protest.

"I didn't get Sunday's [tea garden holiday] wages. I missed out on two days' wages because I participated in the strike for a day," she explained.

Maloti Gonju, another worker, shared that her family hasn't had a decent meal in a long time.

"The price of everything in the country is increasing. But our wages are not [in accordance with prices]. Are we not humans?" she lamented.

Another worker Amrika Gonju, who runs a family of seven with her income, said, "Whether I eat or not, I have to feed my four

children. This is something that I cannot do with this wage. Do our lives mean nothing?"

What their collective experience wants to tell everyone is that not only have they been deprived of fair wages all this time, the protest has also taken a toll on them and their families, due to lost wages.

And this is not even all of their miseries.

According to the Labour Act, there's a rule that requires workers to be made permanent after 90 days of working. However, many tea workers haven't been made permanent even after working for six to seven years.

Rajat Kanti Biswas, general secretary of Bangladesh Trade Union's Moulvibazar unit, said it's yet another battle to become a permanent worker in the tea gardens.

Rajat said the delay is intentional so that the company has to pay less to workers in the form of provident funds after they retire.

"Some people in the tea-worker population try to earn a living by working as day labourers in brick kilns, roads or paddy fields. However, not all of them have the scope to work outside. There's a risk of cancellation of the allotted house or losing the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Bangladesh-India ties champion the people's benefit Says Indian envoy

UNB, Dhaka

Every effort of both Bangladesh and India to deepen their partnership is based solely on the understanding that it will benefit the people of both countries, said Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram Kumar Doraiswami yesterday.

"The future of our friendship is with the people first and foremost. And yes, it is based on the values and goals that you set for yourself in the first years of your independence," Doraiswami said.

As a nation that shares every possible commonality, plus nearly 4,100 km of border, India is, was and will always be a friend to all of Bangladesh, he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Govt can't evade responsibility for Momen's comments Says GM Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader yesterday said the government cannot avoid responsibility for Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen's recent statement on seeking India's help to keep Sheikh Hasina in power.

"Such a statement has also embarrassed our neighbouring friendly country India. It also brought into question the sovereignty of the country," he said.

GM Quader made the remarks while exchanging greetings with the leaders and prominent personalities of the Hindu community on the occasion of Janmashtami at the Jatiya Party Chairman's Banani office.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

When it rains, grandpa Ali comes to rescue

S DILIP ROY

Umed Ali, a 66-year-old boatman from Kurigram's Baraibari is a popular figure in his village.

During monsoon, when the Baraibari canal fills up with water, school-goers used to face great difficulty getting across to attend school on the other side.

But thanks to Ali, these children don't have much to worry about now. Due to his contribution, he is now known to every child in Baraibari as "Grandpa Ali".

Though driving his boat is his livelihood, Ali doesn't take money from the students.

As a father of four himself, he is very well aware of the challenges students face to pursue education in these poverty-stricken villages of Kurigram.

Ali lives with his wife by the river Dharla. All his children are now married and have settled elsewhere.

Although Ali is a seasoned fisherman, he can't go fishing regularly as his body often surrenders to fatigue. Therefore, even at this age, helping people cross the canal is his main source of income.

This barely puts food on his plate three times a day, let alone provide for the medicines he needs to keep his body functioning.

"I cannot catch fish like before because of the disease in my body. The family is somehow running with what I am earning," he said.

Many in his village wonder why Ali carries on with this selfless act when he can't afford it.

"The love I receive from the students is bigger than any monetary incentives. They call me grandpa. If I didn't do this, many parents would have simply not



Meet Umed Ali, the 66-year-old boatman of a char village in Kurigram's Baraibari. The local children call him "grandpa Ali" with adoration. For the past few years, this grandpa has selflessly contributed to his community by helping children go to school on his boat, without taking a single penny in return.

PHOTO: STAR

3 of a family die from electrocution in Cumilla

UNB, Cumilla

Three members of a family were electrocuted in Muradnagar upazila of Cumilla yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Hosne Ara Begum, 60, her son Tara Mia, 30, and her grandson Rifat Hossain, 8, said Jashim Uddin, a local UP member.

Rifat went to collect some vegetables from a land beside their house at Elkhal village.

He got electrocuted when an electric wire connecting Doulatpur with Elkhal fell on him from a pole around 1:30 pm. As his uncle Tara Mia and grandmother Hosne Ara rushed to save him they got electrocuted too, said UP member Jashim Uddin.

Later locals informed Doulatpur power office to cut the power connection but they died in the meantime, he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2