

RU comes to a halt on JCD strike

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University (RU) came to a standstill yesterday as RU unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) observed the first day of the indefinite strike they called for on Thursday.

RU JCD called for the indefinite strike demanding removal of RU Vice-chancellor (VC) Altaf Hossain and Proctor Enamul Haque for what they said was failing to stop the police attack on JCD activists on Thursday.

Classes and examinations due to be held were postponed and university bus service remained inoperative. University central library and administration building were also closed. JCD staged a demonstration on the campus and brought out a procession yesterday.

At a meeting in front of the central library, JCD leaders alleged the VC and proctor had failed to

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Body on cards for capital subway

RAFIQ HASAN

The government is considering setting up an independent Metro Rail Authority (MRA) to install an underground railway system in the capital.

Earlier local company Contech proposed to build up a 52-kilometre underground railway network with six major routes at a cost of Tk 5,200 crore using cut and cover method that the company termed 'cheap and cost effective'.

"We have recognised that an underground railway system is necessary for solving the problem of traffic jam and easing transportation of the city people," said a high official in the Ministry of Communications.

The ministry will recommend forming the independent MRA like

Jamuna Multipurpose Authority for building the subway, development of which involves different government agencies, he said, adding that a concrete decision about forming the authority will be taken very shortly.

He said the MRA will examine whether the system would be developed through cut and cover or tunnel boring method and take the final decision through coordination among the government agencies concerned.

Conducting a feasibility study by the government is necessary before going for such a complex construction, he added.

A few months back, the communications ministry submitted a proposal to the Planning Commission for allocating Tk 7

crore for conducting the study but the ministry is yet to get it, the official said.

The system will be developed with the involvement of foreign company on build operate and transfer (BOT) basis, he said.

He, however, said building a subway in an overcrowded city like Dhaka would not be very easy, as such a construction will require stoppage of traffic for a long time.

The government called a pre-qualification tender in February 2003, seeking application to set up underground railway in Dhaka.

Only two companies responded, of which local firm Contech Limited passed in the pre-qualification bid.

Contech Ltd also committed to

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2 die while cleaning up sewerage line

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two sweepers died of asphyxia while cleaning up an underground sewerage line at Lalbagh in the capital yesterday.

The dead are Sohrab Hossain, 35, a Dhaka Wasa sweeper and Dulal Gazi, 22, who were working under one of the eight contractors appointed by Wasa to clean sewerage lines in the old part of the city.

Dulal Gazi got into about 12-foot deep sewerage drain in Haranath Ghosh Road around 1:00pm to clean the drain, witnesses said.

"I heard Dulal cry 'Save me, save me, I can not breathe' moments after he stepped into the drain," said Sayeed Hasan Shaheed, who was sitting in a nearby tea stall.

Soon Sohrab got into the drain to save his fellow cleaner but he also met the same fate, Sayeed said.

Peeping into the drain, locals

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PHOTO: STAR

This open manhole on the first Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge in the capital poses risk of accidents. The lid of the manhole, which is used as entrance to the maintenance room under the bridge, was stolen a couple of months ago.

PBCP leader killed in 'shootout'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Regional commander of Purba Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP) Janajuddho faction Tapash Mistry was killed in a "shootout" between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his accomplices in Batiaghata upazila early yesterday.

Tapash was arrested on March 31 at Shachibania village in the same upazila.

According to Rab, the "shootout" took place at Daunia village at around 3:00am yesterday when the outlaws opened fire on the Rab personnel who took Tapash to the village. Rab members fired 28 shots to retaliate against the attack.

One pipe-gun and two bullets were recovered from the spot.

Tapash, 40, was sentenced to life for murdering Nirmal Mondol of the Altaf faction of PBCP in 1990. But he was released on bail by an order of the High Court.

Rab says Tapash was directly involved in the murder of Bagerhat BNP leader MA Awal in December 2001, grocer Thakur and fish trader Anupama in June 2003 and Bolai alias Bolaram in January 2003.

Apart from these murders, Tapash had been wanted in many other criminal cases filed with different police stations in Khulna and Bagerhat.



PHOTO: STAR

Thick foam appears on the Trimahoni canal on the outskirts of the capital as water mixed with toxic chemicals and other waste materials from factories pour into the canal through a drain. The photo was taken yesterday.

DU printing press idle for a decade causes Tk 7cr loss

KAMRUL HASAN KHAN

The 55-year-old printing press of Dhaka University (DU) is lying idle for more than a decade, causing financial loss to the tune of Tk 7 crore.

Every year the university does printing and binding work worth Tk 10 lakh from the DU printing press while the authorities spend Tk 40 lakh on printing and binding work from outside, sources said.

In last ten years, the university did printing and binding work worth Tk 1 crore from its printing press while the authorities had to spend over Tk 6 crore in salaries and other benefits to its officials and employees.

During the period, the authorities had to do printing and binding work worth about Tk 4 crore - Tk 2 crore on printing and binding materials and Tk 2 on printing from outside.

If the authorities could do those printing and binding work from its own press, the total cost would stand at Tk 2 crore only, said a source.

Thus, in the last one decade, the

university had to incur a loss of about Tk 7 crore from its printing press.

The printing and binding of some examination papers, tabulation sheets and admit cards of examinations are still being done from the DU printing press while the printing and binding works in connection with convocations, souvenirs, annual reports, diaries and other necessary documents of different faculties and departments are done from outside.

The DU printing press, established in 1950 near the campus, still use letterpress-printing process, which has become obsolete in this era of modern technology.

An officer of the press requesting anonymity said the printing machine remains mostly unworkable, as spares of the machinery have become rare as such a press is no longer used in the country.

A total of 73 officers, technicians and workers are working at the press.

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JUDICIARY SEPARATION SC full bench to hear contempt rule against 9 officials today

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The full bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (SC) headed by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassir Husain will hear the contempt rule against nine bureaucrats for distorting its directives on the separation of judiciary today.

On March 1, the court adjourned the hearing until April 2 due to illness of Appellate Division Judge Fazlul Karim.

The accused government officials are Joint Secretaries of the Establishment Ministry Lokman Hakim, Badrul Alam Tarafdar and Md Abdur Rab Hawlader, Deputy Secretary Md Abul Kalam Azad Chowdhury and Senior Assistant Secretary Md Khalilur Rahman; Deputy Secretary of the Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry Shaiful Islam Talukder and Senior Assistant Secretary Mohammad Harunur Rashid; and Deputy Secretaries of the Cabinet Division Md Fazlul Huq and Finance Ministry AKM Motaleb Hossain.

Official facing contempt charge becomes judge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior Assistant Secretary in the law ministry Mohammad Harunur Rashid, who has been facing contempt charge for distorting the High Court directive on the separation of judiciary since November 2004, has become joint district judge at the Dhaka District Court.

Legal experts termed the promotion undesirable.

"There is no legal limitation that an officer facing contempt charge cannot be promoted to another post. But it is an undesirable and embarrassing situation," Justice Gholam Rabbani, former judge of the Supreme Court Appellate Division, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Supreme Court on November 29, 2004 issued the contempt rule upon nine officials including Harunur Rashid.

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Shias call for Iraq PM to step down

6 killed in minibus ambush

REUTERS, AP, Baghdad

Senior members of Iraq's ruling Shia Alliance bloc called publicly for the first time yesterday for Ibrahim al-Jaafari to step down as prime minister to break months of deadlock over a national unity government.

"I call on Jaafari to take a courageous step and set a fine example by stepping down," Kasim Daoud, a senior member of the independent group within the Alliance, told Reuters.

Other senior Alliance officials, speaking anonymously, confirmed

that four of seven main groups within the bloc wanted Jaafari to give up the nomination for a second term if, as is all but certain, he fails to persuade minority Sunni and Kurdish parties to drop their refusal to serve in a cabinet under him.

"There is a broad trend inside the Alliance who want Jaafari to do this (step aside) and we expect him to do so," Daoud said.

"We have stood behind him for 50 days and today we have reached the conclusion that there should be a prime minister for all Iraqis, not just one group," he added.

"Daoud's call is supported by at least 60 percent of Alliance members of parliament," another senior Alliance official from another group within the bloc told Reuters.

"We need another 24 hours before starting the battle" to pressure Jaafari into resigning, he added.

Alliance officials said the seven key groups inside the bloc had met on Thursday and Friday and concluded by a four to three majority to

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US cuts all contacts with Hamas-led government

AFP, Washington

The United States has suspended all contact with the Palestinian government led by Hamas, the US State Department announced Friday.

However, the administration will maintain contact with the Palestinian Authority's representative in Washington, Afief Safieh, because "he does not report to the foreign ministry," deputy State Department spokesman Adam Ereli told reporters.

The new Palestinian minister of foreign affairs, Mahmud Zahar, is a Hamas hard-liner.

"We've advised our mission in Jerusalem, as well as other missions around the world that... there should be no contact between US government officials and P.A. (Palestinian Authority) officials who are under the authority of the prime minister or any other minister in the Hamas-led government. This includes working-level officials in those ministries," said Ereli.

Banned Indian chicks seized in Khulna

Birds smuggled in due to pricey local ones

STAR REPORT

A hike in prices of local chicks is encouraging smugglers to bring in banned Indian chicks.

The experts fear that the Indian chicks might carry the deadly bird flu virus as an outbreak of H5N9 virus was revealed here recently. In the last two days thousands of chicks that had been smuggled from India were captured from different parts of the country.

The government banned import of chicks from more than 20 countries after the flu outbreak at those

places. The ban gave rise to a monopoly of local chick producers in the market.

"The price of local chicks has increased up to Tk 40 from Tk 12 each within a few days. But the price of Indian chicks is no more than Tk 5," said Syed Abu Siddique, secretary general of Bangladesh Poultry Owners Association.

Nearly 30 thousand chicks that had been smuggled in from India were captured within the last two days.

The Detective Branch (DB) of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP)

seized 13,200 banned Indian chicks from a house on East Link Road in the city yesterday morning, our Khulna correspondent reports.

Officials of the Livestock Department suspect that the chicks worth Tk 4 lakh were affected by bird flu. They were smuggled into the country through Chapainawabganj border and brought to Khulna on Friday, the police said.

They said 7,000 of the seized chicks died yesterday afternoon. The others were to be culled by this

Church set ablaze in Panchhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A group of criminals on Thursday night set fire to a Church in a remote area in Panchhari upazila of the district, officials said yesterday.

BDR sources said the arson attack at the inaccessible Lumbapara might have link with

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Thais go to polls today amid opposition boycott

Ruling party running unopposed in half of seats

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand goes to the polls today in an election called by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as a referendum on his leadership, but an opposition boycott has reduced the vote to a one horse race.

Some 45.2 million people are eligible to vote in the poll, which Thaksin called three years early in a bid to end weeks of mass street rallies set off by allegations that he abused his office for personal gain.

Polling stations are due to open at 8:00 am (0100 GMT) and counting will start after the polls close seven hours later. Provisional results are expected to trickle in

throughout Sunday night. While the result may seem a foregone conclusion - Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party is running unopposed in 200 of 400 constituencies -- the election is unlikely to resolve the political standoff.

Election officials warn that even an apparent victory might not be enough to form a parliament. Dozens of the party's candidates could fail to win the 20 percent of votes required to take office.

Some 322 of 941 candidates have already been disqualified, meaning there might not be enough lawmakers elected to

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BSF abducts 2 from Kushtia border

UNB, Kushtia

The Border Security Force (BSF) of India kidnapped two Bangladeshi boys from the border here yesterday.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources said BSF picked up Nimel, 13, and Rintu, 12, of Charpara village while they were fishing in a small river near the main pillar no 157 at around 8:00am.

BDR condemned the incident and asked its Indian counterpart to return the boys.



PHOTO: STAR

Farmers and 14-party activists of Kolaroa upazila barricaded the Jessore-Satkhira road near Kolaroa Government College in Satkhira to protest frequent power cuts and scarcity of fertiliser.

Farmers block highway for power, fertiliser

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Several thousand farmers brought out a procession, barricaded the Satkhira-Jessore highway and held a rally at Kalaroa yesterday protesting repeated load shedding and scarcity of fertilisers in the area.

Kalaroa upazila unit of Awami League (AL)-led 14-party opposition coalition organised the program and brought out a broomstick procession, which started from the premises of local AL office.

More than 3000 angry farmers barricaded the Satkhira-Jessore highway from 11:00am to 1:00pm in front of Kalaroa Government College demanding smooth supply of power and fertilisers.

Traffic on both sides of the highway was interrupted for over two hours due to the roadblock.

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