

Transport strike

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was present.
The meeting, third since the country-wide strike began February 8, followed two other rounds of talks with the Communication Minister Col (ret'd) Oh-Ahmed and the Authority Chairman, late Tuesday night and in the morning.
The bilateral talks mainly focused on an announcement of withdrawal of the on-going strike programme by the transport owners and signing of an accord between the two parties.

subsidy of Taka 114 crore in the transport sector if the price was lowered by Taka one per litre and fixing the price at the pre-Gulf war level (Taka 6.90 per litre) was totally impossible, he said.
The leaders, on the other hand, insisted that the government accept and implement their demands.
The government has decided to expedite commissioning of an emergency oil reservoir in view of a panic buying of fuel owing to the countrywide transport strike.

15,292 cases

The State Minister requested the owners to call off their strike in the backdrop of an assurance by the government in the Parliament to cut fuel price from coming July.
The Communication Minister told the Jatiya Sangsad last Monday that all but one of the 19-point demands of the transport owners had been settled much before the strike began.

Other reasons for the strike besides reduction of fuel prices to the pre-Gulf war level, were slashing of duty on the spare parts by 25 per cent, stoppage of illegal toll collection, increase in the presumptive tax and decentralisation of the route permit issuance system.

The leaders of the striking transport owners at the meeting, however, pressed for signing of a draft agreement proposed by them.

A leader of the association earlier told the Daily Star that they were ready to call off their strike if the government agreed to sign the accord and implemented the 18 demands by April 30, as announced by the government. He also said the owners were also ready to accept the announcement of reduction of fuel price after the coming budget.

The minister told the meeting that prices of the fuel would be reduced "as low as possible" from July 1.

He pointed that the government would have to give

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query, Mujibur Rahman informed the House that the nationalised commercial banks owed Taka 2170.49 crore to 10 state-owned industrial units. The amount of loans with interests was accounted till November 1991, he said adding that various steps were underway to realise the outstanding loans. The highest amount of such loans of Taka 1168.58 crore lies with the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, he added.

In reply to the question raised by Tabibur Rahman Sardar of the Awami League, the State Minister said that loans worth Taka 977.48 crore was taken from the Bangladesh Shilpa Bank for 618 projects till September 1991. Of the amount, Taka 392.57 was overdue, he added.

None of the projects for which the loans were taken from the Shilpa Bank was found to be a fraud, the State Minister said in reply to another question by Musharraf Hossain.

In the current fiscal year, Taka 468.75 crores in defaulting loans were realised and Taka 560.69 crores fresh loans were sanctioned by the commercial banks and the DFIs, the State Minister said in response to a question of Mohammad Asaduzzaman of the Awami League.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia distributing prizes among the Ansar and VDP members at the Ansar Academy at Shaifpur yesterday. —PID photo

Work for rural uplift, PM urges Ansars, VDP

SHAIFPUR (Gazipur), Feb 12: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today expressed the hope that Ansar and VDP would serve as workforce in the rural uplift programmes the government has undertaken, reports UNB.

"We have taken up a number of development programme for changing the lot of rural masses. A disciplined and sincere workforce is necessary for successful implementation of the programmes," she told a rally of the Ansar and VDP members.

The Prime Minister was addressing the 15th National Rally of Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) at the Ansar Academy here this morning.

Begum Zia, on arrival at the Academy, was received by Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury and Acting Director of Ansar and VDP Brigadier Mohammad Abed Miah.

She reviewed a smartly turned out marchpast which included women members of the force and took salute.

Ministers, leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina, MPs, Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Noor Uddin Khan, diplomats and senior civil and military officials also attended the function.

The Prime Minister said the sacrifice, sincerity, courage and patriotism with which Ansar and VDP performed their duties for the country would be the source of inspiration for all in building the nation.

She lauded the activities of

the assemblage during various national crises alongside their usual role of assisting different agencies in maintaining law and order and safeguarding the country's independence and sovereignty as well as property of the citizens.

The Prime Minister termed population boom as a snag on way to economic emancipation of the people and hoped the force would be more active in assisting implementation of government's family planning programmes.

The Prime Minister also mentioned government's steps in education and health sectors and called upon them to make those a success.

She asked the female members of Ansar and VDP, almost half the total force-strength, to help free the rural women from the curses of dowry and torture by motivating them to become self-reliant.

Begum Zia urged them to participate wholeheartedly in canal digging and re-excavation programme aimed at boosting food production.

The Prime Minister distributed prizes among the members of Ansar and VDP for outstanding performance in various fields and went round different projects, including Small and Cottage Industries Training Centre and agricultural and pisciculture farms.

The function was rounded off with a colourful cultural show spread wide across the premises of the Academy and presented by members of the force.

Govt hesitancy

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signal to the public in general and the pressure groups in particular. The impression is that as long as a sizable group can be put together behind a set of demands then the government can be pressured into agreeing to them, regardless of the cost.

At some stage this will have to stop and the government will have to put its foot down and say 'We just cannot afford'. But how on earth will the government ever get public support for such moves, if it never comes to the public?

In each of the above instances the government should have taken the public into confidence and should have presented facts as to how each case of pay hike, tax deduction, reducing fuel price, etc was going to cost the nation. What is the price-tag each time a so-called accord is signed.

Throughout the current crisis caused by the transport owners, the government carried on — as usual — secret negotiations and then suddenly we were told that 18 out of 19 demands have already been acquiesced to. What prevented the government from telling the public how much it would lose in revenue if the fuel price and tax on spare parts were brought down as demanded? And where would the government get the money to fulfil its budget if it did?

The Leader of the Opposition, the other day, reportedly said that it is the duty of the government to find money. The government can only find money through increased tax, the burden of which our people cannot bear; borrow more from donors thereby increasing our debt; or print more money thereby further worsening the inflation situation. What did the Honourable Leader of the Opposition mean?

Of the issue discussed above, the ruling party never made any attempts to bring any of them to parliament. When confronted with the type of pressures and agitation that we have recently seen, the first thing the majority party should have done was to lay bare the situation before our elected representatives and seek their help in solving them, thus morally obliging

them to help implement any agreement reached.
The pay hike of the President and the Prime Minister, and the bill for the enhancement of pay and privileges of the MPs, could not have come at a worse time. After such a move how can the government, or even parliament, ask others — who are decidedly less fortunate than them — to follow a policy of austerity?

In all these matters the government has seldom taken the media into confidence. Why not give them more facts — less opinions and sermons — as to how much fulfilling each set of demands will cost the nation? Talk openly, through the media, about the options before the government and seek public guidance as to which one is the most acceptable. This will bring the government closer to the people and help build public opinion in favour of tough measures as and when they become necessary to take.

But then, all this really refers to transparency and accountability of the government. How sincere is the BNP government in being both?

BTMC loss

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order to identify the problems of the mills, jointly visited all the eight mills earlier.

Briefing newsmen I K Siddiki said that the Committee would form an action committee to monitor whether all the concerned mills authorities were actively working to remove the already identified reasons behind the continued loss in the industrial establishments.

Replying to a question the Committee members said the Textiles Minister Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan had positively responded to the Committee report and expressed utmost desire to implement the suggestions in the report.

The Public Accounts Committee has meanwhile formed four separate sub-committees to examine the audit objections in the audit reports of the rest of the 16 ministries.

According to the committee members, they would be able to make reports on the audits of all these 16 ministries by the end of 1992.

Legal action

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Malik Samity, a Press Note issued by the Ministry of Communications said in Dhaka last night.

The Press Note said the present government has already taken different steps to build the road transport system properly. Unfortunately though, it was true that the owners of road transports did not show respect to the goodwill of the government, the Press Note added.

In this connection the Press Note referred to the two-hour long threadbare discussions held in the Jatiya Sangsad on February 10 on the situation caused by the transport strike. In the wake of discussion in the Sangsad the Communications Minister on behalf of the government stated in clear terms that after holding discussions for twenty months during the last eight months the government gave possible solutions in respect of the transport owners' 18 demands out of total 19. The government also, held out the assurance to reduce the price of diesel as far as possible in the new July '92 budget. It said.

Besides, the government has taken steps in exempt duties in the import of new buses, mini buses, trucks, tank lorries etc and extend bank loans and other facilities considering the transport sector as industry, the Press Note further said.

It expressed the hope that the people of the country would extend their all-out cooperation to the government in the solution of the problem caused by the strike.

Meanwhile, the country-wide strike of private buses, minibuses, and trucks continued for the fifth day Wednesday increasing the hardship of the people all over the country.

As the railway is the only means of distance communication, the trains are running jam-packed with passengers, who are compelled to undertake journey to different places. The rush of people for tickets of Inter-City Trains is so heavy at different major railway stations that many have to return home frustrated.

In Dhaka city the sufferings of the people of all walks of life accentuated further with the continuation of the transport strike. Office goers and employees of various business establishments living on the outskirts of the capital are the worst sufferers.

High prices of essentials have also added to the hardship of the people.

The Midnight File

Court allows Diana to open office in Calcutta

CALCUTTA, Feb 12: A local court today rejected a petition which sought to bar the Princess of Wales from officially opening the new British consular office in this eastern Indian city Saturday. Justice S N Chakraborty of the city civil court dismissed the petition, filed by the owner of the site on Ho Chi Minh Street, where the British Deputy High Commission is nearing completion, reports AFP.

Libya bows to pressure

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 12: Facing international pressure and a threat of economic sanctions, Libya agreed Wednesday to provide evidence and witnesses in France's investigation of the explosion of a French airliner over Niger in 1989. But in a communique released by the United Nations, Libya did not commit itself to meeting another demand, that it hand over suspects in the bombing of a Pan Am jetliner over Scotland in 1989, reports AP.

Russian call to take N-forces off alert

GENEVA, Feb 12: Russia called today on the world's five nuclear powers to take their nuclear forces off alert status and remove all warheads from their missiles to avoid accidental firings. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozirev made the proposals to the conference on disarmament meeting here, reports AP.

Mustafiz starts Europe, ME tour today

Foreign Minister A S M Mustafizur Rahman leaves Dhaka today on a 16-day trip to several European and Middle Eastern countries for discussion on bilateral matters.

"The visit is goodwill in nature but substantial discussions are expected on bilateral issues", he told BSS about the trip.

DU campus

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campus thoroughfares where a tense situation was prevailing. Our DU Correspondent adds: A group of armed youths tried to enter the Shahidullah Hall of the Dhaka University Wednesday night firing several rounds of shots.

The attackers were reportedly the activists of the Awami League backed Chhatra League. Campus sources said that the attackers could not enter the hall as the gate was locked. No injury was reported so far.

Later, the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) brought out a procession inside the hall chanting slogans against the Chhatra League, sources added.

Kashmir

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to be lost to show solidarity with the uprising in Indian Kashmir.

"Pakistan holds the cause of Kashmiri people dear to its heart but we cannot let Amanullah Khan lead innocent people before the Indian firing squads," AFP says. Nawaz Sharif called on India to grant the people of divided Kashmir the right of self-determination, indicating that his government did not rule out the possibility of independence for the territory.

5-party move to rally professionals

By Staff Correspondent
The Five-Party Alliance has decided to organise a meeting of various professional groups, socio-cultural organisation, freedom fighters and people of various classes on February 14 to find out ways to gear up a united movement to oust Golan Azam, Ameer of the Jamaat-e-Islami from the country.

The decision was announced at a press conference held Wednesday at the Col Taher auditorium at Bangabandhu Avenue.

Shaheed Day

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was quite different.

The Second Congress of the Communist Party of India in February, 1948 in Calcutta decided a separate Pakistan branch of the party had to be set up. According to Badruddin Umar's three-volume "East Bengal's Language Movement", the party in East Bengal faced state repression and other obstacles to its work as an open political party from the very beginning.

On March 11, 1948, a day after the first general strike to demand Bengali as a state language, the party's provincial and city offices at Kaptan Bazaar and Court House Street were attacked and ransacked by Muslim League hooligans. Party leaders Ranesh Dasgupta and Dharani Ray were arrested the next day alongwith others involved in the Language Movement.

The party organised a major rally at Coronation Park in the city on June 30, 1948 to publicise its programme and manifesto. But the meeting, presided over by Munir

Chowdhury, was disrupted repeatedly by Muslim League musclemen led by Shah Azizur Rahman. Party offices were again attacked the same evening.

In July, more party leaders were arrested in Dhaka, in addition to those thrown into prison for revolutionary or terrorist activities in rural areas, in line with the decision taken at the Second Congress.

From July onwards, the party's leaders increasingly began to work from underground. Most of the party's political activities had also to be conducted from behind the scenes.

Membership of the party which had stood at, according to Umar, 10-12,000 in East Bengal at the beginning of '48, began to drop rapidly, depleting the party of the number and the will to conduct revolutionary politics.

It was not until the Jubo League was organised in March, 1951, that the Communist Party began to play a major in the Language Movement, and therefore, the politics of the country.

Seen from the gallery

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Badruddoza Chowdhury. The memo requests the Sangsad actors to appear in a special magazine programme to be telecast on the first anniversary of the free and fair general election in the last week of February.

Not knowing what his role would be the old actor wanted to know how so many people could be given the hero's part. And he made sure that he was not ready to appear in a side role. Because, if that be the case, it would be breach of his privilege.

Then came the clarification from Badruddoza Chowdhury. He informed that it would be a 'jalsha' (cultural function) of the MPs in order to convince the people that they always did not do dull things.

Prof Chowdhury disclosing that he would be the compare of the programme said: If Mohiuddin Saheb wants to be the hero and Nizami Saheb wants to perform 'Bharat Natyam' I have nothing to say.

"Moreover, we will have a provision for those who won't perform anything. They will act like dead soldiers," he added.

This prompted a clarification from Jamaat leader Mr

Nizami. He said Mohiuddin Saheb earlier said that he (Nizami) was opposed to this programme. It was rather a 'trick'. In rural areas, we know, people refer to others to justify their own case, added Nizami. But he was generous enough to give unconditional support to Mohiuddin Ahmed saying that he had no objection in giving Mohiuddin the hero's role.

Finding it difficult to resist temptation to take part in the juicy debate, Barrister Nazmul Huda stood up and informed the House that there were also good singers among the MPs. He disclosed that he heard Motia Chowdhury singing Tagore Songs in a cultural function.

The presiding Deputy Speaker came forward to add another name. He said Prof Chowdhury is also a good singer.

But it was not the end. Mohammad Nasim, Chief Whip of Awami League, suggested that if Mohiuddin Saheb became the hero then Nizami Saheb should be given the role of the villain. Atleast, he added, Information Minister Nazmul Huda can be a good substitute for Mr Nizami if he (Nizami) regrets.

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The next step was to send out applications for the research fellowship. And believe me, it took some doing. Hunting for addresses. Electric-typing each application. Photocopying all the certificates. And stamps, stamps, stamps. Posted each envelope personally. Settled down to a long wait. The postman became Man of the Year. But every evening found an empty mailbox. Until a moment ago. "It's Harvard, no less!" I think I deserve a Gold Leaf now.

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