

Strike-struck DU bogged down

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Strike enforced by a combine of six opposition-backed student bodies on September 14 has kept the varsity paralysed for 23 days to date, further aggravating its already too acute session jam syndrome.

Once the country's prime centre of tertiary education, the DU now barely manages to stagger on, tangled up in enormous session jams leading to two- to nine-year delays in academic activities.

Repeated strikes by students, teachers and other staffs, raging political violence, preoccupation of faculty in consultancy and other external jobs, deferral of examinations under students' pressure and late publication of results are some of the key stumbling blocks to maintaining the academic calendar.

The situation is the worst at the Institute of Fine Arts, which now caters for nine batches of students instead of five regular ones, with the batch of 1990/91 academic year still unable to complete its 3-year BFA honours and 1-year masters' courses.

The DU students are at least two years behind their academic schedules, said a DU official. And what is more alarming, the logjam is set to worsen thanks to the ongoing strike, he added.

He said the 30,000 students of the varsity might lose three to six academic months due to this abrupt pause. Classes and examinations have to be rescheduled. So results would come out later, resulting in more intense accommodation crisis at the dormitories.

Mustafizur Rahman, a political science undergrad, gave voice to the majority of students, saying, "We don't understand politics. What we know is it's really tough for our parents to send us money every month for studying. So, we don't

want to linger on here unnecessarily, adding to their troubles."

Referring to the strike, DU Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz said, "We would need considerable time to make up for the delay and session jam this closure will inevitably produce. We will try our best to minimise the loss of academic time by rearranging the postponed examinations."

POSTPONED EXAMS

DU Controller of Examinations Mohammad Abdul Latif said, since February last, frequented strikes forced some 550 examinations at different departments and institutes of the varsity to be postponed.

Another official however put the figure of postponed examinations at around 600 and said at least 2,000 classes were dropped this year due to strikes and closures for other reasons. The fresh dates for the deferred exams have yet not been announced.

The sluggishness of examiners also lends support to the session jam. Though they are required to submit results to the controller of examinations within three months time but the faculty of most of the departments and institutes consume at least five to six months for doing that.

"The day would come soon when no one will want to enrol in public universities fearing the repeated closures," said DU Treasurer Hasan. "But, we are really helpless, we can't do anything to stop student organisations calling strikes," he added.

FORCED STOPPAGE

Apart from the scheduled vacations, the university was forced to keep shut for about 670 days in the last 14 academic years.

Every year the DU enjoys some 90 days of vacations. Together with forced stoppage of academic activi-

ties, it remained closed for 22 months in the last four years and three months from July 2000 to September 2004.

On an average the varsity has lost over 47 days a year to strikes and other impediments.

This year academic activities at the university were suspended for 22 days due to the attack on late Prof Humayun Azad, 18 days to flooding, 30 days to strikes of students and teachers, and another 10 days to hartals and other reasons, official sources said.

The varsity lost 21 academic days in 2003-04, 72 in 2002-03, 74 in 2001-02, 22 in 2000-01, 23 in 1999-00, 56 in 1998-99, 18 in 1997-98, 23 in 1996-97, 55 in 1995-96, 42 in 1994-95, 22 in 1993-94, 10 in 1992-93, 94 in 1991-92 and 51 in 1990-91.

TOO MANY TOO LONG

At least seven batches of students instead of five are currently studying at the various DU departments and institutes. The students of 1997-98 batch are yet to finish their 5-year course.

The situation is worse at the Science Faculty, where the 1996-97 batch is still to pass out. While the worst condition is at the Institute of Fine Arts, with nine batches swarming the place.

The session jam has also brought in acute accommodation crisis in all the 19 student dormitories.

The students are also being deprived of many other facilities, including transportation, library, food and study materials, due to the overcrowding.

The DU VC said, "I hoped they [the opposition combine] would call off the strike for the greater interests of students and studies." He sought cooperation from all to bring back normalcy on the campus.

Parliament still hobbles

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culture of both the ruling and the opposition parties has put the current parliament on a back burner and their activities are concentrated outside the House sparking political confrontations and recurrent violence.

The Jatiya Sangsad, which should be the centre of all political activities, is functioning even worse than under the past two parliaments – fifth and seventh – in terms of workdays and the functioning of the committee systems in the previous parliaments.

The eighth Jatiya Sangsad has apparently failed to make its standing committees function effectively, witnessed a regular quorum crisis and fewer workdays most of them were boycotted by the main opposition. Besides, it passed some controversial laws, a number of which were passed without proper scrutiny.

Until now, the House has not even nominated a deputy leader to act in absence of the Leader of the House, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. In her absence the Jatiya Sangsad functions with a proxy deputy leader from one of the senior ministers.

The parliament also failed to ensure female representatives, although the constitution was amended last July to introduce 45 reserved seats for women. But election to these reserved seats is likely to take few more months.

The House engaged in only three general discussions in the last three years; on law and order, the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) rally and the recent floods.

The opposition lawmakers demanded discussions on various burning issues and submitted more than 500 notices but the speaker rejected all of them, favouring the treasury bench members who did not agree to hold discussions on the issues.

The main opposition, AL, did not participate in discussions concerning the August 21 grenade attack and recent floodings as the speaker did not agree to hold the discussion adjoining other business of the House.

The current parliament began its journey on October 28, 2001 with the main opposition boycotting the House, rejecting poll results and alleging widespread persecution of its leaders and minority communities after the October 1 elections.

The fifth (1991) and seventh (1996) parliaments saw participation of the main opposition at the beginning but both parliaments became ineffective in the wake of the boycott by the main opposition parties in the third year of their tenure.

The AL joined the House in June 2002 in the third session after boy-

cotting over 70 consecutive workdays. It started boycotting House proceedings anew the following year when a junior minister's remarks on the Leader of the Opposition, Sheikh Hasina, incensed its deputies and who when staged a noisy walkout.

After an 11-month boycott, AL returned to the House this year just for one day to participate in the obituary reference on its slain lawmaker Ahsanullah Master.

Then the main opposition joined the budget session and again boycotted parliament proceedings from September 15 in protest against the speaker's refusal to hold discussions on the August 21 grenade attacks, adjourning the business of the House.

But the government and the speaker are so far unable to create an atmosphere in parliament, which can bring the AL back to the House.

As the AL boycotted the House frequently, the Jatiya Sangsad sat without the main opposition lawmakers on two-thirds of its workdays. So far, legislators of the AL were present in the House on 74 out of the total 226 workdays.

The current parliament met on fewer workdays than earlier two parliaments. Until the 13th session, prorogued on September 16, the parliament saw 226 workdays while the first 13 sessions of the fifth parliament saw 286 workdays and the seventh 256 days.

The fifth parliament had a total of 22 sessions with 410 workdays and the seventh parliament saw 23 sessions with 372 workdays. The statistics suggest that the current parliament would witness fewer workdays compared to the past two.

Yet the current parliament will go down in history for creating some rare precedents including the removal of an elected president, AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, by a parliamentary party resolution in June 2002.

It created another precedent by adopting a censure motion against the sitting leader of the opposition for her comment about the late president Ziaur Rahman.

The House passed a total of 102 bills including the joint forces indemnity bill, which indemnified the army, Bangladesh Rifles and police personnel who manned the anti-crime Operation Clean Heart, in which about 50 people were killed across the country in 'mysterious circumstances'.

Some other much-talked-about bills, passed by current parliament to repeal some laws passed by the previous government, include the repeal of the security of the members of Father of the Nation's family act, the display and preservation of the portrait of the Father of the Nation act and the Public Safety Act.

Troops at pump houses

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corporation authorities to install additional water pumps, deep tubewells and power generators for an adequate production and supply of water. He also asked the Wasa authorities to utilise their water vehicles and manpower properly.

Officials of Wasa and other city corporations requested the minister to make special arrangements to avoid load shedding especially at the water pumps and treatment plants so that they can operate without any disruption.

Dhaka Wasa informed the meeting it can supply 150 crore litres of water a day against the demand of 210 crore litres in the capital. To overcome the shortage of 60 crore litres, it will install or repair and re-install 16 deep tubewells in the areas facing a deficit of water.

Eight deep tubewells will start operation before Ramadan at Dakkhinkhan (Mollartek), Nukunja-1, Nukunja-2, Tajmahal Road (Kishoholy), Madhubazar (generator-operated), Shaheenbagh, Khilgaon and Swadhinata Swarni (Badda).

Another eight deep tubewells will go into operation during Ramadan at DOHS-1, Argagaan-2, Eskaton, Uttara-2 (Armed Police Battalion), Sunibir Housing (Mohammadpur), Tekpara (Badda), Rajarbagh-2

(inside Police Line) and SM Sen Road, Narayanganj.

Twenty-one water-carrying vehicles Of Dhaka Wasa – eight new and 13 old – will remain operative around the clock. Moreover, 27 plastic tanks and nine trolleys will be used for emergency water supply, the meeting was told.

A number of complaint centres in the capital will receive complaints around the clock to ensure that required steps can be taken immediately.

For revenue collection, six taskforces will work as vigilance teams and inspect water pumps and treatment plants.

Dhaka Wasa also plans to install 10 more deep tubewells soon at Kalwalapara (Mirpur), Rupnagar, Jatrabari Wapda Road, Monipur, Channia Housing, Meradia School, Lichu Bagan, Osmani Udyan, Sundarban Park and Siddeshwari School.

State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Ziaul Haq Zia, secretary of the ministry, managing directors of Dhaka Wasa and Chittagong Wasa, chief executive officers of all of the six city corporations and other high officials were present at the meeting.

WB works for urgent

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He, however, mentioned that flow of additional IDA (International Development Association) resources would mostly depend on progress of utilisation of resources.

His assurances came as Saifur Rahman, in the meeting with the WB president in the US capital, called for bank's support in the post-flood rehabilitation operation and additional IDA allocation to implement I-PRSP goals for accelerated economic growth and faster poverty reduction.

The minister highlighted the recent macroeconomic achievements of the government as well as improvements in the performance of social sectors like health, education etc.

He informed the World Bank president about the colossal damage to agriculture and infrastructures caused by the recent floods.

He said Bangladesh has successfully managed the relief operations with its own resources and made particular mention about the unparalleled resilience demonstrated by the people once again to face the natural calamity.

Wolfensohn lauded the performance of the government as well as the people at large to minimise the loss of human life to a record level in the

face of such devastating natural calamity.

World Bank Vice-President Praful C Patel, Bangladesh Ambassador to USA Syed Hasan Ahmad, Alternate Executive Director of World Bank Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan and ERD Secretary Mirza Tasadduq Hussain Beg were present at the meeting.

Earlier in the day, Saifur addressed the World Bank sector directors on the political economy of reforms and development priorities of Bangladesh.

The minister narrated the evolution of development strategies of Bangladesh as well as reform initiatives in policies and institutions.

He cited wide-ranging reforms initiated in various sectors by the present government over a decade ago and benefits derived in terms of socioeconomic development of the country.

He mentioned that Bangladesh has already achieved 98 percent primary school enrollment and gender parity in primary education. "Bangladesh has also achieved impressive success in decelerating population growth rate and reducing infant mortality rate," he said.

Opposition backs

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Skop will hold rallies and meetings at Motijheel, Hazarbagh and Tejgaon in the capital and in all divisional and district towns during the hartal, its leaders said at a press conference at its office yesterday.

They called upon all members of Skop – an umbrella organisation of workers' bodies – to restrain from their duties and make the strike a success.

Bangladesh Mukta Sramik Federation General Secretary Mujibur Rahman Bhuiyan said workers and lower class employees have long been deprived of just wages and facilities but the government has taken no steps to resolve their problems. Continued price hike of essentials has made their lives all the more miserable, he mentioned.

The government had declared a minimum wage for workers in 2000 through a gazette notification but it was not implemented due to some court proceedings. But the government is still inactive in this regard, said Mujibur.

"Where will the workers and employees go if they are not rehabili-

tated after the factories are shut down," asked Shafiqur Rahman, a Skop leader.

Skop leaders reiterated their demand to stop privatisation of government-owned commercial banks, mills and factories, and ensure job security, just wages and other facilities of the employees and workers.

But sources in the Ministry of Labour and Employment said the government has already increased dearness allowance of workers by 10 percent and met some of the nine-point Skop demand and some more are under consideration.

A committee comprising workers' leaders, government representatives and mill owners are working on setting up a labour court, they mentioned.

State Minister for Labour Amanullah Aman at a meeting with Skop leaders on September 26 sought their cooperation in resolving their problems but they are now enforcing strike, the sources said.

UK ready

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Scotland Yard has already been handed to the Bangladeshi side and the outcomes of the investigation are expected to be released after the report is examined by the local intelligence agencies.

Jay said he asked his counterpart about the issues he had raised with State Minister for Home Affairs Luftozzaman Babar on Monday.

The issues Jay had brought up with Babar were related to human-rights violations during Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) operations and an international threat from the possibility of Bangladeshi criminals going across borders.

The British head of the diplomatic service also said there is a need for shared perception of challenges between each states in a world that is becoming increasingly dangerous.

Shamsher Chowdhury told the reporters that they had shared their "thoughts on some issues" and that Jay had extended a British offer to cooperate in improving the quality of law-enforcement agencies in Bangladesh.

The bulk of the discussion in the hour-long meeting centred on strengthening economic relations and co-operation between the two countries.

Private news agency UNB adds: Dhaka sought greater British investment to face an uncertain economy at the end of the multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) during the meeting.

Asked if London had asked Dhaka for sending troops to Iraq, Jay said, "It is an issue for the Bangladeshi government."

He added the two sides discussed not only Iraq but also possible Bangladeshi peacekeepers to be sent to Sudan. He also said they had discussed how to strengthen the UN in global affairs. Jay also lauded Dhaka's commitment in the 'global war on terror'.

Shamsher Chowdhury said Dhaka still sticks to its position on UN's assuming the central role for Bangladesh to offer any assistance to Iraq.

Jay is expected to leave today at the end of his three-day visit.

Cabinet

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Justice Joydul Abedin, head of the one-man judicial commission that probed into the grenade attacks on a rally of the main opposition Awami League, earlier told journalists about 'foreign enemies link' to the attacks but did not reveal the name of any country.

The report was submitted to the government on October 2.

AL, whose 20 leaders and workers were killed in the attacks, rejected the report but wanted the government to make it public.

LDCs

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three developing countries will contribute a certain portion of their export income to compensate the revenue earnings of the LDCs. The developing countries have accepted it but the percentage is still being discussed.

There will be another fund for providing technical assistance to the LDC countries. Apart from arranging a fund, developing members will also extend expertise in some areas including a customs procedure modification.

All the countries will sit at the concluding session today to hold a wrap up discussion covering ROO.

A total of 38 government officials from seven South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saaarc) countries are participating in the talks.

Staff, job seekers

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during the recent recruitment of third and fourth-class employees.

The employees and job aspirants said the director had received bribe up to Tk 1.5 lakh from each aspirant assuring them of giving job. Dr Bhuiyan however denied the allegation and said he would take legal steps against the transfer.

Tension spread fast when the director received his transfer order at 10:30 Monday night.

The employees and some job aspirants gathered on the hospital premises and decided to demonstrate against the transfer order.

"We will not let him go this way before we get the job," an aspirant told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

He, however, said the wards and relatives of those who have retired from the hospital should get priority in the recruitment process.

Power sector

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Bangladesh community in Britain is playing an useful role by making meaningful contributions to British society and economy.

Referring to British scholarships provided for many Bangladeshi students for studies in Britain, Jay said the British government has also decided to increase the number of scholarships for Bangladeshi students.

The prime minister hoped that the Britain would invest more in Bangladesh availing of the advantages of investment-friendly atmosphere and policies.

She hoped that relations between the two countries would be further strengthened in the days to come.

Jay said the British government appreciated Bangladesh's major contributions to the UN peacekeeping mission.

Jay renewed the invitation of British Prime Minister Tony Blair to Prime Minister Khaleda to visit Britain. The prime minister accepted the invitation and said that she would go to Britain at a mutually convenient time.

Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamaluddin Siddiqui and British High Commissioner in Dhaka Anwar Chowdhury were present.

Nobel physics

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Its (the coin's) movements are in fact determined by the fundamental forces between the basic building blocks – protons, neutrons, electrons, the Academy said.

Their research has built a model of how the universe was born, how it works and how it will ultimately die, said Finnish theoretical physicist Stig-Erik Starck.

Gross from the University of California, Politzer from the California Institute of Technology and Wilczek at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology will share the \$1.36 million prize.

The police and factory authorities said the bombs hurled exploded on the packaging floor when production was going on, prompting panicked labourers to rush out. However, there was no casualties or damage to machinery.

The police collected splinters from the scene and were examining those.

IG prisons

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as additional secretary to agriculture ministry.

Bangladesh ambassador to Qatar Major General Ahsan Nazmul Amin was called back to Dhaka and attached to the Army Headquarters.

Executive Director of National Nutrition Council Ashraf Mohammed Iqbal and Director (finance) Rajab Ali were made Officer on Special Duty (OSD).

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mission."

Mukul, who filed the petition for Taheruddin, said, "It is impossible to record his statement. He is paralysed and cannot move at all."

A diabetic patient for 30 years, Saifuddin is being suffering from Parkinson's disease since 1999.

"While filing the petition, I didn't know Saifuddin is so unwell. He even responds to the call of nature on the bed."

"I'll take no further steps that might delay the judgement of the case," he said.

Deferring the judgement, Metropolitan Sessions Judge Mohammad Motiur Rahman fixed September 29 for recording his statement, but the 84-year-old former police officer failed to appear before the court like many times in the past.

The court formed the three-member commission on that day, asking it to submit report by October 9. It also issued a non-bailable arrest warrant on Saifuddin for not appearing before the court.

More ammo found

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abandoned in a shanty. However, it was not immediately known who owns the shanty.

Intelligence officials believe Mukul, a suspect of the August 21 grenade attack, and his gang are linked to the grenades and firearms seized on Monday.

Mukul is now on the run as he is chargesheeted accused in last year's Badda grenade, time bomb and firearms case and has close ties with Imam Hossain, one of the top 23 police-listed criminals who controlled Sattola slum and nearby TB Hospital slum. The slums are hotbeds of drug peddling and gun-running, sources said.

Investigators and locals said the cache seized on Monday was under the possession of Mollah Shamim, who was the second-in-command of Imam, a former joint secretary of Dhaka Dal north unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal.

Intelligence officials stepped up their drive to search out Mukul after a video footage confirmed his presence at the AL rally on August 21.

Sub-inspector Jamal Uddin of Rab team filed two cases under Arms and Explosives Acts with Gulshan Police Station yesterday. He accused Abul Kashem and Akkas, whom Rab claimed to be the owners of the shanty.

The bloodstained copies of newspapers and some news clippings on the August 21 grenade attack have reinforced the investigators' suspicion, another official said.

Deputy Commissioner of North Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Golam Rasul said they are suspecting Mukul's link to the seized cache.

Police recovered four AK-47 assault rifles, two revolvers, 20 hand grenades, four time bombs and huge numbers of AK-47 bullets and explosives after a gunfight with a criminal outfit at Kuril Badda last year.

Residents of Dakkhinpara in Sattola slum said two dark-complexioned, medium-sized men aged around 40 lived in one of Kashem's shanties. The shanty had a secret passage where the cache was seized from.

"Some people including Mollah Shamim visited the two men and stayed there for long," said a neighbour of Kashem, wishing anonymity.

Kashem was a night guard at the Infectious Diseases Hospital which is surrounded by Sattola slum. He lived in a room of the slum with his wife, a sari vendor, a son and a daughter. He moved elsewhere with his family after Mollah Shamim was arrested and killed in a 'crossfire'.