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Launch workers on indefinite strike

Passengers' sufferings mount as talks with owners for salary hike end inconclusive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The inland water transport sector of the country virtually came to a grinding halt yesterday leaving thousands of passengers and goods stranded, as water transport workers went on a countrywide strike demanding a salary hike.

No launch, steamer or cargo vessel has been operating since Thursday midnight, with the exceptions of a few trawlers and small boats.

Since the strike went into effect on Thursday midnight, movement of water transports has remained suspended on all major river routes including in the coastal districts of Chandpur, Barisal, Bhola and Patuakhali.

Thousands of passengers have been stranded at launch terminals,

including at the country's biggest at Sadarghat in the capital, while hundreds returned home failing to board any launch.

Traders also have been facing a severe crisis with their goods being stranded at the terminals.

Sources said there are over 1.25 lakh workers engaged in the water transport sector.

Badiuzzaman Badal, acting chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport (Passenger Carriers) Agency told The Daily Star, "More than 22,500 launches, over 5,000 registered water vessels and more than one lakh unregistered vessels operate on river routes."

He said, "Over 10 lakh people travel everyday by launches and other water transports while more than 60 percent of goods are car-

ried by water transports."

According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), the workers went on the strike as Bangladesh Water Transport Workers Federation (BWTWF) had called upon them on Thursday to go on one from midnight, demanding an increase in their salaries and other facilities.

BWTWF leaders said the recent hike in prices of essential commodities has forced them to go on to the strike. The workers have been surviving on a meagre monthly salary of Tk 1,900.

Abdur Razaq, Dhaka Nodi Bandar Committee president of Bangladesh Launch Labourers Association (BLLA) told The Daily Star, "We have been on a movement with the demands for a year

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Launches stay idle at Sadarghat in the capital yesterday as launch workers go on indefinite strike demanding salary hike.

PHOTO: STAR

Help strengthen motivational programmes for family planning

CA urges all concerned

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday called for strengthening the motivational programmes for workers, landless and floating people, urban slum dwellers and the destitute in char and remote hilly areas to reduce the number of poor people.

The Directorate of Family Planning has taken up a good number of motivational programmes in this regard. But it is difficult for it alone to build up public opinion against the backdrop of low literacy rate, unemployment, unawareness, stigma and superstition, said Fakhruddin.

The chief adviser was inaugurating a programme at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium, marking the World Population Day 2008.

The theme of this year's population day is: "It's a right, let's make it real."

Fakhruddin urged all concerned including different ministries,

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5 die, 20 missing in Netrakona boat capsizes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Five people died and 20 others went missing after a boat capsized in the river Kongsha at Thakurakona under Netrakona Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

The dead were identified as Nurunnahar, 40, of village Boyaljana, Kulsum Akter, 45, of village Khenia, and Ajufa, 40, Yeasin, 11 and a five-year-old Bristy of Sobania village under Barhatta upazila.

Police said a motorboat with about 50 passengers aboard sailed for Sobania under Barhatta upazila of the district from Thakurakona ferry ghat at around 5:00pm.

When the boat was 50 yards of the ferry ghat, it suddenly overturned and sank in the river.

Locals and other boatmen recovered the bodies. Police said 20 passengers went missing, while the rest swam ashore.

The survivors alleged that the boat capsized as it was carrying passengers beyond its capacity.

AL leadership still stuck in Badsha-Liton dilemma

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Awami League's (AL) top leadership is still bogged down over its mayoral nomination for Rajshahi City Corporation polls although 14-party coalition led by the party announced on Thursday that its nominee there is Fazle Hossain Badsha, a politburo member of Workers Party, a component of the coalition.

Talking to The Daily Star a number of senior AL leaders yesterday said they want to maintain unity in the 14-party coalition but they do not understand why Badsha has been nominated instead of AL

central leader AHM Khairuzzaman Liton who has the entire Rajshahi city AL rallying behind him.

Meanwhile in Barisal, although the coalition announced AL City Unit Convener Shawkat Hossain Hiron as the mayoral candidate there, Gono Forum leader Enayet Pir Khan also intends to run for mayor.

Sources said AL's rank and file no longer considers Gono Forum as a component of the AL-led coalition. No leader of Gono Forum attended the 14-party meetings held on Wednesday and Thursday at AL Acting President Zillur

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Wild elephants trample four of a family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Wild elephants killed four members of a family at Tiler Deba village under Lama upazila of the district on Thursday night.

The victims are Sayed Alam, 50, his wife Jarina Khatun, 40, son Mohammed Jubayer, 10, and four-year-old daughter Kulsum.

Villagers said a herd of wild elephant entered the village at midnight and started damaging the house of Alam. They trampled Alam, his wife, son and daughter to death as they were asleep.

The elephants also damaged at least eight houses and trees at the village and injured another named Anwar Hossain.

Hearing screams of the residents of the damaged houses, other villagers left their homes fearing attack.

On information, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) and the officer in-charge (OC) visited the village

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Dialogue may drag on as govt wants to listen to all

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

The dialogue between the government and political parties seems likely to drag on with both sides declining to budge on issues like withdrawal of the state of emergency and parliamentary polls.

While its talks with Awami League (AL) last week did not produce any results, the caretaker administration has yet to succeed in efforts to get parties like BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami to join the dialogue.

BNP and Jamaat see unconditional release of Khaleda Zia and Matiur Rahman Nizami as a condition for their joining any discussions with the government.

Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman is however hopeful they would be able to bring all parties to the dialogue as well as the elections.

After the inconclusive sitting with AL, the government said it

would hold another round of discussions with the party to resolve the contentious issues.

It also announced there would be a series of talks with political parties exclusively on economic issues. Besides, it would hold discussions with civic groups.

Political observers believe it was in itself a daunting task for the government to have results out of the dialogue initially intended to be wrapped up by June. Now with addition of new plans and focus shifted, it would be even harder.

"There's no deadline set. The dialogue will continue as long as it takes," said Foreign Adviser Iftekar Ahmed Chowdhury, adding that the government wants to listen to everyone.

Asked about the outcomes so far, he said a lot of discussions are yet to follow. "We are hopeful we will reach a consensus before the parliamentary polls," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, the talks resume today with a meeting between the government and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis.

The government is scheduled to sit with Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League tomorrow, Jatiya Gonotantrik Party on July 16 and the Jatiya Party faction led by former minister Anwar Hossain Manju on July 17.

Besides, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed is expected to lead talks with rural and urban civic groups at Keshabpur upazila of Jessore district and Khulna city on July 14 and in Sylhet city on July 20.

Since beginning on May 22, the government has held talks with 17 political parties, aiming to forge an agreement on matters like holding of a free and fair national election and reforms in politics.

While the advisers pursue a balance of power between top constitutional positions like the

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Elect honest candidates for country's prosperity

Says Gen Moeen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Army chief General Moeen U Ahmed yesterday urged the people to elect honest candidates in the next national elections to make the country towards prosperity.

He made the call while addressing a function organised by Old Rajshahi Cadets Association (ORCA) on Kuakata Sea beach. ORCA President Engineer Siddiqur Rahman, Secretary Firoz and a Sidr victim also spoke at the function.

"Bangladesh has huge resources. So, it needs honest and efficient leadership to make more progress through proper utilisation of these resources," the army chief said.

Urging all not to sell their votes in the election, Gen Moeen said, "If you sell vote, you might live better for a day, but not for the next five years."

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Thick foam bubbles up as artificially ripened mangoes come in contact with water. Rab-4 seized 24 tonnes of toxic mangoes at Gabtoli and dumped them in the backyard of its office in Mirpur in the capital yesterday.

'Hand over N Bengal Paper Mills to army'

NCC also suggests reopening two other state-owned units

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The National Coordination Committee (NCC) to Combat Serious Crimes has recommended that the state-owned North Bengal Paper Mills and Chittagong Chemical Complex Ltd, which are set up on a total area of 328 acres of land.

Some experts, however, don't think that such an initiative by the government is wise because of continuing corruption and inefficiency in some government sectors.

The government is better off without the losses incurred by enterprises under government management, they say, citing previous experiences.

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Research Director Zaid Bakht said, bereopened.

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The industries ministry has already sent a proposal to the Advisory Committee on Economic Affairs for reopening the Khulna Newsprint Paper Mills, North Bengal Paper Mills and Chittagong Chemical Complex Ltd, which are set up on a total area of 328 acres of land.

Some experts, however, don't think that such an initiative by the government is wise because of continuing corruption and inefficiency in some government sectors.

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Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Research Director Zaid Bakht said, bereopened.



Green chilli hotter, onion prices soar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The price of green chilli that sharply came down last week amid heavy downpour shot up again on the wholesale market yesterday while onion prices kept going up.

Rice prices also increased by Tk 1-2 per kg on the retail market in the last one week. Edible oil prices, meantime, did not register any decrease two days after their prices were fixed.

Five kilograms of green chilli that sold for Tk 30 in the morning

were sold at Tk 50 a few hours later in the evening yesterday, with wholesalers projecting further spikes in the coming days.

Green-chilli price dropped to Tk 2 a kg at Karwan Bazar wholesale market a week back as farmers brought maunds of it on the market due to incessant rains having destroyed the plants, wholesalers said.

A trader said green chilli even sold for Tk 1 a kg on the wholesale market in Manikganj, which usually

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JCD-Shibir clash at CMC leaves 25 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A clash between Jatiyatibadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Islami Chhatra Shibir of Chittagong Medical College (CMC) left around 25 students injured and around 30 dormitory rooms ransacked Thursday night.

The activists of the student organisations also torched five rooms belonging to their rivals at the dormitory on Chattershwary Road causing much damage.

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The college authorities in a hurriedly called meeting declared the college closed sine die and asked students to vacate the dormitories. However, the CMC Academic Council during a meeting last evening decided to resume classes from July 14 and open the dormitories on July 13.

According to sources, a first-year student and a JCD activist was relocated to another dormitory from a room of the main male

Pending cases in city police stations cut to one-ninth

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The number of cases pending investigations in police stations has been brought down to 4,164 from a staggering 35,000 over the last year and a half.

With the reduction in the number of pending cases, harassment of people has also been reduced significantly, since case investigators earlier often kept cases pending just to collect bribes from both the complainants and the accused threatening both parties with possible submissions of biased reports.

Pending cases had reached the staggering number also due to the police department being bogged down with too many duties simultaneously during partisan governments' regimes, like breaking up hartals, maintaining law and order at opposition demonstrations or other political programmes, and providing security for VIPs all at the same time, said sources in the police department.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) authorities reduced the number of pending cases to one ninth of what it had been in just 16 months under a crash programme,

the sources said. According to DMP, 35,203 cases had been pending with 33 police stations, investigations of 31,039 of which were completed between February 2007 and June 2008.

Among the cases that were investigated, final reports were submitted in around 10,000 of them while in the rest of them charge sheets were submitted.

Now the number of pending cases stands at 4,164 which are being investigated by around 500 investigators, mainly sub-inspectors (SI), each of whom is

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