

Ctg commuters bear the brunt

Road march leads to transport crisis in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Normality in Chittagong city was disrupted yesterday during the opposition's rally followed by a road march when commuters had to suffer due to lack of public transport. People having tasks outside were seen stranded for hours and walking helplessly since there were only a few public buses on the roads. The number of rickshaws was also low.

Meanwhile, fearing trouble, many guardians did not let their children go to schools.

Talking to The Daily Star, Abul Kalam Azad, adviser of District Public Transport Owners' Group, said over 200 city buses were hired for the BNP rally. So there were very few buses on the streets.

Chittagong Metropolitan Rickshaw Malik-Chalak Oikya Parishad President MA Quader said, "May be the drivers and the owners had kept their rickshaws off the roads for safety reasons."

He, however, said no instructions were given to stop plying of rickshaws.

Supporters of the main opposition, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir started flocking to Polo Ground in Tiger Pass area since morning. Traffic movement was barred on the streets around the ground for the rally that began around 3:30pm and continued till 6:00pm.

Second year student of Chittagong Metropolitan Commerce College Shabab Bin Jahangir along with his friends was wait-

ing for rickshaw for over an hour and a half at around 2:30 pm after the college hours in Jamal Khan area to go to his residence at Nasirabad.

Like Shabab, most of the city dwellers who came out for daily work, faced immense sufferings as there were very few rickshaws and other public transport due to the BNP's programme.

"I came to college though my father forbade me," Shabab said adding that only 10 students were present in his class while around 60 to 70 students usually remain present.

Safa, another student of the college, said their institute was declared closed for the day one hour earlier as many teachers remained absent.

Hasmat Jahjan, headmistress of Khastagir Govt Girls High School, told The Daily Star that the students' presence was poor in her institution due to the road march.

"In the morning-shift, around 600 students were present and 450 in the day-shift whereas about 800 to 900 students attend classes every day in each shift," she said.

"Perhaps, guardians forced them to stay at home in fear of unpleasant occurrence," the head teachers said.

Prof Shekhar Dastidar, principal of Chittagong College, said admission and other administrative and academic activities were normal, though attendance of students was slightly low.

STUDENT ABUSE CASE Arrest orders against two VNS teachers

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued arrest warrants against Husne Ara Begum, former principal of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College and the institution's Bashundhara branch-in-charge Lutfur Rahman in connection with violation of a female student last year.

Judge Mohammad Arifur Rahman of the Fourth Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression passed the order and asked officers-in-charge of Ramna and Badda police stations to submit reports before the court by February 9 after complying with the order.

On July 5 last year, the victim's father filed the case against the two and Porimol Joydhor, a sacked teacher of the school's branch on Bashundhara campus.

According to case statement, Porimol was accused of violating the student twice at his coaching centre in Badda, on May 28 and on June 17.

Husne Ara and Lutfur were accused of trying to cover up the incident and delaying to take action against Porimol.

On August 11 last year, Shahadat Hossain, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Badda Police Station, submitted a charge sheet of the case before the court accusing only Porimol and dropped the names of other two, as their involvement with the case was not found.

Later the case was shifted to the Detective Branch (DB) of police following a no-confidence (naraji) petition and on November 11, DB submitted another probe report again accusing only Porimol.

However, the court yesterday accepted the charges against Husne Ara and Lutfur as it found allegations against them were authentic.

Porimol, who was detained earlier, was produced before the court during the hearing.

Porimol was arrested on July 6 and five days later he confessed before a court to violating his student.

Economy

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On the country's economy, he said, "We cannot but admit that economy is now under pressure. Taka is being devalued day by day discouraging investment in the country. The government has to take out loans from the central bank to tackle the pressure."

"In this condition, the committee asked the government to stop all sorts of unnecessary expenditure and collect money from international sources instead of local banks."

Mostafa, also a ruling Awami League lawmaker, said they had advised the government to reduce inflation.

"We had invited noted economists in the country to the meeting and they have advised the government to stop unnecessary expenditures," he added.

Mostafa also said the committee had asked the government to enhance foreign funded development projects to increase the flow of foreign currency in the country.

"There is around \$12 billion foreign aid in the pipeline for disbursement. The government should take necessary steps to get the foreign aid."

He said the country's imports were growing faster than exports, putting pressures on the exchange rate.

Talking to The Daily Star, AB Mirza M Azizul Islam said the government must increase its revenue income to cut the budget deficit as well as unnecessary expenditure.

Akbar Ali Khan said, "The government will have to take firm steps right now to control inflation. Otherwise it would be hard for the government to control inflation after six months."

Debapriya Bhattacharya of CPD said, "The country needs a stronger macroeconomic management system. We need to cut down on expenditures and attract more foreign funds."

The economists called upon the government to take unpopular decisions if necessary for the sake of the country's economy.

Quit power

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to mind the upcoming SSC examinations. "I have come here responding to your call and now it's your turn to respond to mine," she told the port city gathering.

Making a set of pledges for her party to implement if voted to power, she said, "Learning from the past mistakes, we will build a beautiful Bangladesh with contributions from the young and the veterans alike."

"We will free the country from corruption and ensure good governance. The price hike of essentials will be contained and farmers will get fair prices for their produce. There will be no traffic congestion."

Urging everyone to participate in the anti-government movement, Khaleda said, "The country at this juncture needs a government of the people."

In her 45-minute speech that began at 4:40pm, she said the next general election must be held under a non-party caretaker government.

"A free, fair and neutral election is not possible under a political government. Neither the people nor the international community will accept such polls. An election without the caretaker government system in place will have no credibility," Khaleda said to rapturous applause from the crowds.

The former prime minister alleged the government had been conspiring to stage-manage the next polls so that Awami League could come to power with HM Ershad's Jatiya Party in opposition.

"They want to clear their debt to Ershad. But this design will not be allowed to be executed." Referring to President Zillur Rahman's ongoing dialogue on the formation of a new election commission, the BNP chief said it was nothing but eyewash.

"No election commission will be able to act independently under a political government."

Blasting the government for deteriorating law and order, in particular, the incidents of disappearances, she said, "Even army officials are now disappearing. Many officers have lost their jobs."

Those, who lost jobs in the army, police and civil administration during this tenure, will be taken back. Khaleda said the AL-led ruling alliance could not do anything in the last three years. "None of their election pledges has been fulfilled. Corruption pervades this government...from top to bottom."

Accusing the govern-

ment of subservience to India, she said, "They want to destroy the army to turn Bangladesh into a vassal of India. We have won independence not to become a state of another country. We'd rather be India's neighbour on the basis of mutual respect."

She alleged that India had built barrages on all common rivers. "But, our government has failed to address the problem. They have already given corridor to India in the name of transit. Indian lorries are carrying arms and ammunition from one part of the country to another, using our land."

Khaleda also vowed to forge "special relations" with the Muslim world if voted to power.

Thousands of leaders, activists and supporters attended the rally to hear the BNP chief. The atmosphere was festive as the opposition party decorated the port city with colourful banners, posters, placards, billboards and lighting.

Swarms of people from the city, different parts of the district and adjoining districts started streaming down to rally venue before noon and there was no room even to stand as Khaleda arrived around 3:40pm.

Yesterday, Chittagong turned into a "city of processions" when small processions started to march down to the ground, chanting anti-government slogans.

The rally spilled over to over one kilometre around the venue.

Alongside BNP men, several thousand activists and supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami were seen active during the rally. Even they occupied the area closest to the stage since morning.

Leaders of the BNP-led four-party alliance and other like-minded parties also addressed the rally chaired by Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, president of Chittagong city BNP.

Many of them demanded release of the Jamaat and BNP leaders now behind bars on charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

"Our leaders are in jail on false charges," said Jamaat acting chief Maqbul Ahmed.

Khaleda Zia started the two-day road march from the capital's Naya Paltan on Sunday morning. Led by her, the caravan reached the port city around 11:00pm that day.

On her way, she addressed three roadside rallies and a public meeting. She was scheduled to return

to Dhaka after the Chittagong rally.

Earlier, Khaleda led three road marches towards Sylhet, Chapainawabganj and Khulna to draw public support for her party's demand for reinstating the caretaker government system.

The government scrapped the system last year through the fifteenth amendment to the constitution, allowing an elected government to hold parliamentary polls.

BNP and its allies had opposed the amendment, and now maintain they will not go to polls unless held under a non-party caretaker government.

Bangabandhu's

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months' confinement in a Pakistan jail. The political icon termed his homecoming "a journey from the darkness to light".

The Pakistan occupation forces arrested the architect of the country's independence on March 25, 1971 at his Dhanmondi residence during the late-night crackdown on the people of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and sent him to then West Pakistan.

Bangabandhu had become the undisputed leader of the then Pakistan through a landslide victory of his party Awami League in the 1970 general elections.

The Pakistani junta was compelled to free Bangabandhu after Bangladesh earned independence on December 16, 1971 through a nine-month-long war.

Awami League (AL) and different organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes marking the day. The programmes include hoisting of the national and party flags at all AL offices across the country, milad mehfil (prayers) and discussions.

A discussion on the glorious political life of Bangabandhu and a milad mehfil will be held in Bangabandhu International Conference Centre at 3:00 pm. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will address the discussion as the chief guest.

Leaders of AL and its associate organisations will lay wreaths at Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's portrait in Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Road-32 in Dhanmondi at 7:00am.

AL leaders will also place wreaths at the grave of the Father of the Nation in Tungipara, Gopalganj. A milad mehfil will also be held there.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam has urged all the party units and people of all walks of life to observe the day in a befitting manner.

China denies Philippine charge of incursion

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday said accusations its navy recently entered Philippine waters were "groundless", as it warned Manila against causing disturbances in the disputed South China Sea.

Manila's Department of Foreign Affairs said on Sunday it had conveyed "serious concerns" to the Chinese embassy over the recent actions in the South China Sea, which Manila calls the West Philippine Sea.

It said two Chinese vessels and a navy ship had been sighted in the vicinity of Escoda Shoal, which is about 113 kilometres off the western Philippine island of Palawan, on December 11 and 12.

"China will not accept the groundless accusations from the Philippine side," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin told journalists.

"We hope the Philippines will not create something from nothing and cause disturbances."

Escoda is well within the Philippines' internationally recognised 200-mile exclusive economic zone, but China claims all of the South China Sea, including the potentially oil-rich Spratly islands.

China's rival Taiwan, as well as Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam, also lay claim to all or part of the Spratlys, which experts have warned could be a flashpoint for potential armed conflict in the region.

Tensions in the decades-old dispute escalated last year amid accusations from the Philippines and Vietnam that Beijing was becoming increasingly aggressive in staking its claims in the area.

Messi

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the prestigious award for the world's outstanding footballer.

The 24-year-old Barcelona and Argentina forward finished ahead of his Real Madrid rival Cristiano Ronaldo and Barca team-mate Xavi.

"It's a great personal pleasure for me," said Messi.

"It's the third time I've won it. It's just an amazing honour. I want to thank everyone that's been involved with me -- my team-mates, trainers, physios, the coach (Pep Guardiola) and everyone at Barcelona."

"I'd also like to thank the Argentina national team as well."

Messi becomes only the second player, after Michel Platini, to win the award for three consecutive years.

Stop charging

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to ensure that they comply with the guidelines regarding admission fees and refund the excess fees taken so far.

Officials concerned of the education ministry, the directorates of primary and mass education, and secondary and higher secondary education, and all the education boards have been made respondents to the rule and order.

An HC bench comprising Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim came up with the rule after hearing the petition jointly filed by two rights bodies - Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust.

The petition followed news reports that private schools across the country are charging admission fees ranging from Tk 8,000 to Tk 32,000.

The guidelines issued by the education ministry in December last year fixed the admission fees for a student at Tk 5,000 in Dhaka metropolitan area, Tk 3,000 in other metropolitan areas, Tk 2,000 in district headquarters, Tk 1,000 in upazila headquarters and Tk 500 in rural areas, the petition mentioned.

Barrister Ashraful Hadi appeared for the petitioners and Deputy Attorney General ABM Altaf Hossain represented the government.

Cops' late night drama

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giving death threats when he went to the house Sunday afternoon.

Meanwhile, police freed Sirajul Huq Chowdhury, member of the university's trustee board, and Junayed Ahmed, deputy registrar of the university, who were also arrested along with Imtiaz at the same time from the private university's Banani campus on the same charges.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner (Gulshan division) Khandker Lutful Kabir yesterday told The Daily Star, "Imtiaz alone has been shown arrested followed by a case filed with Gulshan police by the registrar. The two others were freed against bonds."

Gulshan police had picked up Imtiaz, Sirajul and Junayed around 4:30pm on Sunday. But about an hour later Imtiaz was admitted to a city hospital for treatment, while the two others were taken to Gulshan Police Station.

Contacted around

6:00pm on Sunday, Lutful Kabir told The Daily Star that they arrested all the three persons for attacking the registrar.

But after three hours, the same police officer denied the arrest of Imtiaz and said he was kept under safe custody of police as he was undergoing treatment. Lutful Kabir also said they freed Sirajul and Junayed against bonds.

Contacted further around 11:30pm, the DMP DC again denied Imtiaz's arrest and said that they just had picked up him in a bid to rescue him when he had come under the attack by the university's students.

But officials of Gulshan police station confirmed The Daily Star around 1:30am yesterday that Imtiaz was shown arrested after a case was filed by the registrar.

Asked about his contradictory statements, DC Lutful Kabir yesterday said they could not go for a final decision "due to delay in filing the case".

He said Imtiaz is undergoing treatment at a hospital for injuries to his leg and would be produced before a court after recovery.

Contacted over phone, former vice-chancellor of the university Anwara Begum, also the wife of former president and mother of Imtiaz, refuted the allegations against her son.

She said the case against her son is false and he was arrested as part of a plot to harass the family.

Anwara Begum was the founding chairman and vice-chancellor of the university established in 2004. At the end of her tenure, pro-vice chancellor Abul Hossain Sikder was made its acting vice-chancellor nine months ago.

A university official, wishing anonymity, said a dispute over the university's ownership and the post of vice-chancellor arose when Anwara Begum tried to retain her position and the case against Imtiaz and his arrest are linked to that incident.

Stop filling up

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It also asked the company to explain in three weeks why the construction under the housing project in the city by filling the canal should not be declared illegal.

Meanwhile, Mohammed Munir Chowdhury, DoE director of monitoring and enforcement wing, with a team visited the project area in the city's Khilkhet and found that massive land filling was going on breaching environment laws.

Following his visit, he sent a notice to Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, chairman and managing director of Bashundhara Group, asking him to appear at DoE office today at 11:00am and explain the matter.

In the notice, the chairman was also asked to explain why DoE would not file a case and realise compensation from the housing

company for filling Boalia Khal and a water retention pond which came under the detailed area plan (DAP) of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk).

At the N block of the residential project in Khilkhet, a vast area of 80,264 square metres of the canal has been filled.

The DoE team in its visit also found that the housing company had filled another 37, 89,465 square metres of lowland which Rajuk kept in the DAP as a water retention pond to hold the monsoon rainwater.

Filling up any wetland or natural water bodies is a punishable offence under the Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act, 1995 (Amendment 2010).

The DoE team members said the company had been constructing a road for the housing project on the

filled-up canal.

In 2004, East West Property Development Ltd took a temporary clearance certificate for one year from Rajuk on condition that it would maintain the navigability of the canal, they said. The Rajuk authorities at that time directed it to connect Boalia Khal with the Balu river within 2005.

But the company broke the condition to extend their housing project.

The HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim passed the order after Deputy Attorney General ABM Altaf Hossain drew their attention to the report.

Altaf told The Daily Star that the Rajuk chairman and the chairman of the housing company were asked to stop earth filling and the construction of the housing project.

4 suspects held

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Contacted, CID officials avoided talking about the developments of the case.

However, one CID high-up on condition of anonymity disclosed the name of one arrestee as Farid Khan. He said after the killing incident Farid boastfully announced that he had killed "robbers".

The official said, "Farid and three others had been formally shown arrested first in the drug peddling case but informally they interro-

gated about the murders and found proof of their involvement.

According to CID sources, the arrestee will be produced before the court today seeking further remand.

Aminur Rahim, father of one of the six deceased, Shams Rahim Shamam, who was an A-level student of Maple Leaf International School, told The Daily Star that ASP Sirajul Huq yesterday asked them to be present in the court during the remand hearing.

Shamam, 17, Ibrahim Khalil, 20, Towhidur Rahman Palash, 22, and Kamruzzaman Kanto, 16, of Government Bangla College in Mirpur; Tipu Sultan, 20, of Tejaqon College; and Sitaf Jabi Munif, 21, of Bangladesh University of Business & Technology were brutally beaten to death labelled as robbers on July 18.