

## REFUSAL TO PAY TOLL BCL men beat up trader

Our Correspondent, Kushtia

Chhatra League activists have allegedly beaten up a trader in Kushtia district town as he refused to pay them Tk 2 lakh as extortion money, leaving him critically injured.

The businessman, Abdullah, is now undergoing treatment at Kushtia Medical College Hospital (KMCH). He is the owner of a motor parts shop at Chourhas in the town.

A case has been filed with Kushtia Model Police Station in this connection. Nobody has been arrested yet.

According to the case statement, some activists of BCL, the student wing of the ruling Awami League, led by general secretary of Kushtia district unit Abdullah Al Mamun demanded Tk 2 lakh from Abdullah on May 2. They also warned him of dire consequences if he failed to pay them the money.

On Monday, Mamun along with Sohel, Alamgir, Akbar, Likhon and Sujun halted Abdullah's motorcycle in front of the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation office around 8:30pm when he was returning home from his shop.

The BCL men then beat him up with iron rods and bricks. Several of his teeth were uprooted, and his right knee and right elbow were badly injured.

Locals took him to the KMCH. Abdullah's father Akubbar Ali went to Kushtia Model Police Station to lodge a case, but police refused to take the case against the BCL men.

On Thursday, Akubbar met AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif, who was on a visit in Kushtia, and narrated to him the incident.

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A policeman tears off the tinted sheet from the window of a sports car on Minto Road in the capital yesterday after the deadline for motorists to remove the tinted windows and screens from their vehicles ended on Saturday. The driver of the sports car paying the Tk 1,250 fine, **top right**. Police stops a sports utility vehicle with tinted windows, **bottom right**.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Cop drive raises questions

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in Narayanganj, is still using vehicles with tinted glass.

State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the authorities had not ordered the removal of built-in tinted glass as many government officials, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and diplomats used such vehicles. And it would be a huge task to replace the glass.

However, the ministry may order the removal of built-in glass as well, if

deemed necessary, he told The Daily Star.

The vehicles that came under police action yesterday were mainly minibuses and sedans.

The owners of the vehicles were fined at least Tk 1,250 under the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1983, said traffic officials of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

In some cases, necessary documents of the vehicles with tinted glass were seized. The owners were asked to take back the documents after paying fines

and changing the glass on their vehicles.

Mir Rezaul Alam, joint commissioner (traffic) of the DMP, said they would continue the drive until further instructions from the home ministry.

Habib Ullah Dawn, president of Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicle Importers and Dealers Association (BARVIDA) estimates that there are at least 80,000 vehicles with built-in black and tinted glasses in the country. Most of these are minibuses, cars and jeeps.

These vehicles are used by government officials, businessmen and middle class people, he said.

**CHANGING GLASSES GETS PRICIER**

The prices of transparent glasses have shot up due to a rush among the owners to replace tinted glasses of the vehicles.

Ahsan Habib, who works at a privately owned company, had to pay twice to get the glasses of his microbus replaced.

"It cost me Tk 50,000. Usually this

job costs TK 20,000. As the demand has gone up, they have increased the price," he said.

Vehicle owners also have urged the government to extend the deadline for changing tinted glasses.

"I have been searching for transparent glass for the last three days but haven't found yet. Police have already begun to harass me without even listening to my problem," said Rahat, who works at Onnorokom Group.

"The government should increase the deadline," he said.

## Healthcare at stake

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Health Services (DGHS), and officials of the DMCH and the BMA at the Dhaka Medical College auditorium.

The protesters had earlier observed work abstention for eight hours since 1:30am yesterday after miscreants attacked five doctors, who were on their way back to the DMCH from Chankharpool at 9:30pm on Saturday.

Dr Mominul (Pinu), honorary doctor at the DMCH, was seriously injured in the attack while four of his colleagues managed to escape. He is now receiving treatment at the intensive care unit of the DMCH.

On request from the authorities, they went back to work around 9:30am. But services were hampered as they held meetings and chanted slogans at the country's biggest hospital with 2,400 beds.

At yesterday's meeting, Dr Din Mohammad Nurul Haque, director general of the DGHS, assured the agitators that they would take the issue to higher authorities and find a solution, said sources.

"Though the strike is on, the emergency and outdoor services will be available during the period," Dr Iqbal Arslan, secretary general of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), told reporters after the meeting at 2:00pm.

Such attacks on doctors are totally unexpected. The authorities have to ensure their security, said Arslan.

"We will soon sit for an emergency meeting to discuss how we can end the crisis," he said.

On condition of anonymity, a medical officer said, "We don't want to go for strike, but we have no alternative. Security has become a concern for us."

During a five-hour stay at the hospital yesterday, this correspondent found that dozens of patients were denied treatment for shortage of doctors.

"My daughter Sonia is pregnant. As she was suffering from diarrhoea, we brought her here. But there was no doctor to attend her," said Aleya, the mother of a patient.

She said her daughter was referred to the Mitford Hospital.

"I do not know what the doctors there will suggest," Aleya said as she went out of the DMCH.

At around 1:40pm, 16-year-old Mushfique, who felt pain in the abdomen, was denied treatment.

"The doctor said he [Mushfique] needed to take an X-ray, but it was not possible now," said Mushfique's brother Abdul Salam.

Between 12:00am and 8:00am yesterday, only 20 patients were admitted to the DMCH emergency section, whereas the number usually hovers between 70 and 90.

In the outdoor section, about 820 patients were served while the number ranges from 1,400 to 2,000, according to hospital sources.

According to the hospital authorities, about 920 honorary doctors, 67 interns and 312 government-appointed physicians work at the DMCH.

Dr Khaza Abdul Gafur, assistant director at the hospital, said it was obvious that healthcare would suffer for shortage of doctors.

"The government-appointed doctors will surely provide services, but three doctors will have to do the job of 10," he told The Daily Star.

Though Arslan said outdoor ser-

vices will be available during the strike, a medical officer at the DMCH voiced doubts about it.

Health Minister Mohammad Nasim, now in the US, yesterday condemned the attack on the doctors.

He requested the home ministry to arrest the attackers, and also urged the doctors and interns to return to work, said a press release from the health ministry.

It is the doctors' humanitarian duty to provide medical care. They should not go for any protest that causes sufferings to patients, the minister said.

Meanwhile, the DMCH authorities filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station against 10 to 12 miscreants, including three students of Dhaka University.

The three are Meraj, Ashik and Jewel -- all residents of the university's Shahidullah Haque Hall.

The interns and doctors suspect that the Saturday's attackers were the same resident students of the hall, who carried out vandalism in the hospital's emergency section on May 6, following scuffles between a patient's attendants and some interns over using an elevator.

Police were yet to arrest anyone in connection with the Saturday's incident.

"We have not yet received permission from Dhaka University authorities to raid the hall," Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Acting DU Proctor Prof Amzad Ali said they didn't find involvement of any university students in Saturday's attack on the doctors at Chankharpool.

## Cops act strangely

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the capital's Dhanmondi-8 playground.

Using the name of environmentalists, they also hung banners hailing the greens for freeing Dhanmondi playground from illegal occupation and defaming Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's family. The campaigners say it was meant to sabotage the movement.

On Saturday morning, Ishtiaque, also a telecommunication engineer, was taken to the Dhanmondi Police Station after he was assaulted by some people from the club.

Ishtiaque had tried to pull down some of those banners and festoons.

"The officer-in-charge of Dhanmondi Police Station told me that they could let me go if I could get permission from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Later around 4:00pm they [police] let me go after I gave an undertaking," he said. However, around 7:45pm, police called him over to the police station. He complied and got arrested.

"We have made a huge mistake letting you go, because the highest levels in the government have expressed their anger over your release. They are convinced that you defaced Sheikh Jamal's mural and put up anti-government banners," Ishtiaque quoted the duty officer as saying to him.

Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), at a press conference yesterday morning, said Deputy

Commissioner Maruf Hasan of Ramna zone police told him that Ishtiaque could not be released because of an instruction by the highest level of the government.

However, Maruf denied saying any such thing to Habib. "We arrested Ishtiaque because the club authorities complained about his involvement in Friday's incident."

Asked why Ishtiaque was detained, released and arrested again within hours, the officer-in-charge of Dhanmondi Police Station told The Daily Star, "We arrested him based on the case relating to Friday's incident."

"Initially we were not certain about his involvement and brought him in for primary interrogation."

But after investigation from Saturday afternoon to 8:00pm, the police became convinced about Ishtiaque's involvement in the incident, he added. He too denied receiving any order from government high-ups.

At the press conference, Habib also said, "Using the name of environmentalists, a vested group hung banners and festoons around the Dhanmondi playground, belittling Bangabandhu's family and the government."

The meet was arranged by activists of "Save the Dhanmondi Playground" movement at Dhanmondi's Chhayanaut Bhaban.

He said all the banners and festoons used by Bapa and the other organisations that are involved in

the movement are made of cloth, not PVC material, with which Friday's banners were made.

"We did not carry out any of the activities of this movement without the media's presence," Iqbal said.

Habib pointed out that the actual campaigners would never make the mistake of using the word "Engr" before architect Mobassher Hossain's name.

President of Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) Mobassher Hossain, architect Salma A Shafi, Kamrunnahar Dana, general secretary of Bangladesh Women's Sports Association and former cricketer Gazi Ashraf Hossain, as well as other eminent personalities and human rights activists were present at the conference.

The campaigners demanded punishment to conspirators who are trying to insult the government and Bangabandhu's family and sabotage the movement.

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club, a limited company, has been illegally occupying the playground for the last few years.

The High Court in 2011 ordered the city corporation, police and public works ministry to open the field to the public and remove all illegal structures from there.

On April 18 this year, the club sued Mobassher Hossain, Iqbal Habib, Salma A Shafi and Quamrunnahar Dana for entering the playground.

However, after at least two years of restriction, on April 24, the Dhaka South City Corporation opened the playground to the public.



An MRP information collection and passport distribution office in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. The office, along with seven others in the South-East Asian country, was supposed to start operating in April.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF DATAEDGE

## Passport supply in a shambles

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software solution for passports under the first MRP project in 2010. It had set up its central system in Agargaon and it is contractually obligated to technically support future expansion of the MRP issuance centres at home and abroad.

The government had been issuing MRPs from 30 other district offices using IRIS's system.

The problem began in 2012 when the government floated a tender for a new project to expand the service by establishing passport offices in the remaining 33 districts of the country.

Even though IRIS made a bid, it lost the Tk 136 crore project to a consortium of local company, Dataedge and Polish PWPW.

The consortium's software and system need to be integrated with the ones of IRIS but since IRIS lost the expansion project, it started using delaying tactics.

The integration is still incomplete resulting in non-issuance of MRPs from those passport offices.

This conundrum prompted officials of three ministries, foreign, home and expatriate welfare, to sit for a meeting today (Monday) at the foreign ministry to find a solution and urgently start delivering MRPs.

Passport seekers in the affected 33 districts are currently obtaining their

travel documents from other district offices.

However, Bangladeshis in Malaysia are in a pickle. They have no alternative source to get MRPs. As per international rules, their passports would become invalid after November 24.

The Department of Immigration and Passport has so far issued several letters asking IRIS to provide the necessary technical support as per its contractual obligation. It recently asked the project director to take legal action against IRIS.

"The matter is technical and complicated. We have been working hard for the last three days to resolve it," said MRP Project Director Brig Gen Masud Rezwana refuting the allegation that they were not doing enough.

Senior Secretary of the Home Ministry CQK Mustaq Ahmed claimed that during meetings the Malaysian company made verbal promises to him to provide support. "They are bound to do it," he told The Daily Star, adding that the matter would be resolved in a day or two.

When asked about her company's non-cooperation, IRIS project manager Lee Soo Mei told The Daily Star last night, "I don't have any comments."

**MORE WAIT FOR EXPATS**

Around 5 lakh Bangladeshi workers, students and others in Malaysia are waiting for MRP.

Bangladeshi firms Dataedge and ipeople got the enrolment job beating IRIS and two other companies last year.

As per the deal signed with the Department of Immigration and Passport on February 12, the two companies readied eight regional enrolment centres in as many Malaysian states.

The helpline of the enrolment centres would remain open 24 hours a day, enabling the expatriates appointments through phone calls. But the enrolment is yet to start as the integration of the centres with the central system in Dhaka was not done.

Information of the expats, their photos and finger prints, are supposed to be sent to the passport office at Agargaon in Dhaka from the centres so that their passports could be printed.

The enrolment was supposed to start on April 21.

Additional Home Secretary Shafiqur Rahman, who recently visited the enrolment centres in Malaysia, said the crisis would be resolved soon.

Successful implementation of the MRP project in Malaysia is important for Bangladesh expats in other countries like Saudi Arabia and UAE where most of the 45 lakh expatriates have the old passports. The job for providing passports in the Middle East is still going through the tender process.