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Unrest puts poor in a tight spot

Job scope for day labourers, workers shrink amid blockade

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

"They [political parties] are fighting for power and we are paying the price ... these hartals and blockades bring us nothing but misery and suffering."

This is what day labourer Jotsna Das said in frustration at the ongoing political crisis that has dealt a heavy blow to poor people like her.

The mother of four was among some 250 labourers who gathered beside a road near Natun Bazar in the capital's Baridhara area yesterday morning to get work.

They didn't have much idea about politics. All they knew was hartals and blockades, which are used as political tools, have put them in dire straits.

"Like every other day, I came here around 6:00am today for work. I didn't get any work for the last 10 days due to the ongoing blockade," said Jotsna.

"I was supposed to pay last month's house rent by January 15. But I couldn't. Moreover, I had to borrow Tk 5,000 from a shopkeeper to feed my six-member family," she said.

Jotsna felt lucky yesterday morning when she got work. She happily left the place but returned in a sombre mood within an hour.

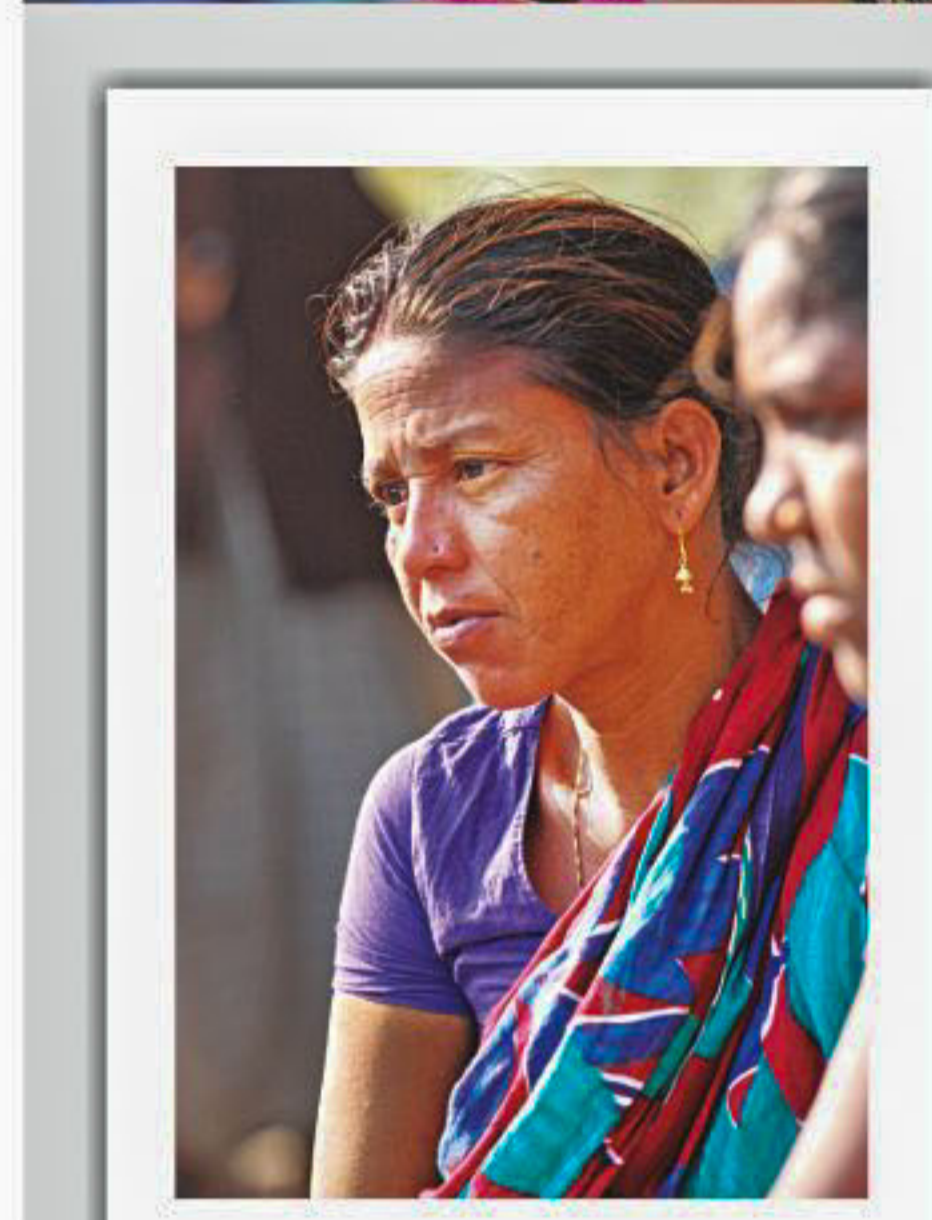
"The work was not suitable for me. I was asked to dig in waist-deep water. I have to wait for work again."

Usually, day labourers, who gather there in the morning, get hired at least five days a week.

But the BNP-led alliance's nationwide blockade left most of them jobless, as the demand for day labourers went down sharply.

By 10:00am yesterday, a few labourers got work. Many others, including Jotsna's husband Babu Das, left for home, while around a hundred more kept waiting there.

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"They [political parties] fight for power, leaving us jobless"
JOTSNA DAS

"We want an end to this fight right now, or else we will be doomed"
KULSUMA BEGUM



"Not only me, everyone wants to see normalcy back in the country. Will our politicians listen to us?"
MOHAMMAD ARIFF

FUMING IN SILENCE
People of low income group suffer as political parties tussle for power



"If the blockade and hartal continue, we will have to leave the capital"
AZIZUL MIAH

Yet another sabotage on railway

Train derailed as tracks uprooted in Brahmanbaria

STAR REPORT

Railway service was again hit yesterday as a train derailed in Brahmanbaria after saboteurs had removed lines on the first day of the BNP-led alliance's 36-hour hartal.

The capital's rail link with Chittagong and Sylhet was suspended after six bogies of the Sylhet-bound Joyantika Express derailed in Paghachong of Brahmanbaria at 2:10pm, said Sayedur Rahman, assistant director of Bangladesh Railway.

"Saboteurs removed sections of the railway lines leading to the derailment. We are working our best to restore the rail link," he told The Daily Star.

A relief train from Akhaura headed for the site to begin the rescue operation, he said, adding, "Salvage operation will take less time since Paghachong is adjacent to Akhaura."

The railway network was also hit before the agitation. Commuters suffered a haywire train schedule amidst subversive activities throughout the country.

Since the beginning of the BNP-led combine's blockade, four incidents of sabotage have so far taken place as alleged blockaders removed fishplates and rail

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PM AT KHALEDA'S OFFICE
BNP response under fire at Sangsad
Some BNP leaders too make self-criticism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Treasury and opposition bench lawmakers in parliament yesterday lambasted the BNP high-command for "not allowing" Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to meet and console Khaleda Zia following the death of Arafat Rahman Koko.

They said all social norms were violated by

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'Solution in a week' turns out to be farce

SHAKHAWAT LITON and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

That violence would end in seven to ten days, an arrogant forecast by some ministers last week, turns out to be a joke as that period nears its end.

Arsonists continued their terror attacks on public transport, burning innocent people to death just as they did throughout the ongoing blockade called by the 20-party coalition led by the BNP.

The all-powerful ruling Awami League leaders, who publicly boasted about containing the violence only to pacify the peo-

ple, now privately appear highly skeptical about their prophecy coming true.

"The way the arsonists are carrying out ambush, it is very difficult for the law enforcement agencies to stop them," a minister told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, referring to the attacks on public transport even under police protection.

Preferring anonymity, a very vocal senior AL leader meekly agreed: "It is not possible to bring a solution to the political crisis by administrative measures."

The BNP-led alliance responded to the

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NEWS ANALYSIS

No hope?

People's expectations for an end to crisis remain unfulfilled

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Is there really no light at the end of the tunnel?

This vexed question has been raised afresh following the latest political development centring Sheikh Hasina's failed attempt to meet Khaleda Zia.

The death of Koko had suddenly produced a flicker of hope of bringing the two leaders close, setting aside the fierce political

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2 'criminals' killed in Rab 'shootout'

Rab chief sees no extrajudicial killings, says their arms meant for use against criminals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Allegations of extra-judicial killings against Rab were mere propaganda, claimed Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed yesterday.

His comment came barely 11 hours after two alleged criminals were killed in a "shootout" in the capital's Banashree area.

He said arms were given to the law enforcers to curb crime not for "playing ha-du-du or danguli [traditional sports]", reports our Khulna correspondent.

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Breaking protocol, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets US President Barack Obama as the president and First Lady Michelle Obama disembark from Air Force One in New Delhi yesterday.

OBAMA IN INDIA 'Breakthrough' in US-India nuclear deal

STAR REPORT

Reflecting great bonhomie and personal chemistry, India and the United States yesterday achieved a major breakthrough in operationalising the stalled civil nuclear deal in the biggest outcome of the talks between Barack Obama and Narendra Modi yesterday.

Addressing a joint media conference with Indian prime minister at the Hyderabad House, the visiting US president said the two countries have reached a breakthrough on two issues holding up civil nuclear cooperation between them.

For his part, Modi said India and the US are moving towards commercial operationalisation of the Indo-US nuclear deal, writes our New Delhi correspondent Pallab Bhattacharya.

"Civil nuclear deal was the centrepiece of Indo-US understanding," Modi said. "Six years after the bilateral agreement, we are now moving towards commercial cooperation..."

India and the United States signed the civilian nuclear deal in 2008, but differences remained over an Indian nuclear liability law that makes equipment suppliers ultimately responsible for an accident. Countries like France and the US have asked India to follow global norms under which the primary liability lies with the operator.

Since all the nuclear power plants in the country are run by the government-owned Nuclear Power Corporation of India, the deal is a significant step towards normalising relations between the two countries.

PHOTO: AFP

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Editors for talks to end impasse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newspaper editors yesterday urged the government to resolve the ongoing political crisis through discussion.

In a view-exchange meeting with several ministers at the Secretariat's information ministry, they said the country should no longer go through this impasse that had rendered people helpless.

"We made it clear that we stand against violent activities....we don't want any chaos and we want peace," Golam Sarwar, editor of the daily Samakal, told reporters after the meeting.

"This should come to an end. We've proposed that the government resolve it through discussion," Sarwar, also president of Editors' Council, said.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said: "We all want peace in the country. We want this political impasse to end so that the country can move ahead

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