



OUTSIDE DHAKA

Economy in dire straits

Blockade-crippled districts major worry for finance boss

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Serious transport disruption between the capital and districts for more than one month due to the opposition's blockade has emerged as a major threat to the economy, said Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday.

Dhaka getting cut off from the rest of the country is dangerous for the economy and "this is the most serious concern", he told reporters at a briefing at the secretariat. "We will have to keep the districts functional."

As the BNP-led alliance began enforcing the countrywide blockade on January 6, pickets resorted to deadly arson and petrol bomb attacks, torching hundreds of trucks and buses and burning dead more than 60 people so far.

The blockade has paralysed supply chain and hit farm incomes, inter-district road and rail communications and local businesses, particularly the small ones.

Farmers are the worst affected as they are not being able to transport their produce to market. Shop owners say their sales have dropped by 70 percent.

"The impact of hartals in Dhaka is insignificant, but the effect at district level is becoming dangerous," said Muhith.

Deploying security for additional hours to deter violence is another financial burden. A finance ministry official, seeking anonymity, said law enforcers have so far sought Tk 100 crore.

Muhith, however, declined to disclose the amount and said, "We are yet to make any additional allocation of fund. The expenditure of the law enforcing agencies including the police and Border Guard Bangladesh [BGB] has gone up sharply."

- GDP growth to be revised down
- Food inflation up
- Supply chain disrupted
- Farm produce rots
- Retail sales fall by 70 percent
- Tourists cancel tours

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With no room left, the injured in the petrol bomb attack on a bus in Gaibandha being treated on the floor of Rangpur Medical College Hospital yesterday. People are seen fanning them to give them some comfort.

PHOTO: STAR

More arson, more deaths

3 killed in Barisal; 3 more victims of Gaibandha attack die

STAR REPORT

Six more names were added to the list of those killed in mindless arson attacks since the BNP-led alliance enforced an indefinite countrywide blockade on January 6.

Three were killed in a firebomb attack on a truck at Gournadi of Barisal while three more burn victims of Friday night's arson on a bus in Gaibandha died yesterday, taking the death toll in the grisly attack to six.

Including the six, as many as 66 people were killed in the ongoing violence, mostly in the form of arson attacks on cargo and passenger vehicles.

In Barisal, alleged blockaders hurled a petrol bomb at a poultry feed-laden truck in Mahilara area around 4:45am. As the truck caught fire, the driver lost control on wheels and hit a roadside tree, reports our Barisal Correspondent citing witnesses and police.

On impact, the front side of the truck caved in, trapping the driver and two others inside while the fire from the Molotov cocktail engulfed the vehicle, police constable Abdur Rashid, who witnessed the incident, told this paper.

Firefighters and locals doused the flame and rescued them but three were declared dead at Gournadi Health Complex, police said.

The victims were trucker Ijayedul Islam, 35, from Badarpur of Faridpur Sadar; his father-in-law Motaleb Sheikh, 65, from Tambulkhana Bangdoba of Faridpur; and

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He had a choice: Starving to death

MEHEDY HASAN, Rangpur

The end of the harvest season left him without job for about a month. The little money and food that he had saved were all gone. Forty-year-old Tara Mia knew staying home would result in the starvation of his four-member family.

"I had only one option ... go to Dhaka and find work," he said lying in a bed at Rangpur Medical College Hospital. "I knew people were getting killed in arson attacks. But I had to take the risk for the sake of my wife and children," said Tara, a victim of the arson attack in Gaibandha Friday.

"Please ask them [alleged blockaders] to shoot us dead, not kill us in this inhuman way," he pleaded to The Daily Star correspondent around noon yesterday.

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PHOTO: STAR

Injured Tara trying to help his daughter at RMCH yesterday noon. He was unaware that his son had already died.

SHOCKING SHOOTING



In a blatant display of thoughtlessness, a photographer makes an arson victim pose at the high dependency unit (HDU) of the burn unit in Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. Visitors, including journalists and camerapersons, often step over the line, creating chaos and disturbing patients at the unit, access to which is supposed to be strictly restricted.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Leading citizens to meet Hamid

Want president's help to initiate national dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Civil society members yesterday said they were working towards a national dialogue for an immediate end to the present political crisis and for a permanent fix to the unhealthy cycle of violence over elections.

"We will meet the president soon to press for a dialogue," former chief election commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda told this correspondent after attending a roundtable discussion titled "National Dialogue in National Crisis".

Under the banner of Jatiya Oikya Process, the daylong discussion was held at the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital.

From a list of 25, four to five civil society members are to be selected by today to meet the president, said the former CEC who chaired the first session.

Huda, Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain, Nagorik Oikko Convenor Mahmudur Rahman Manna and several others are heading the push for the dialogue process.

Speaking at the discussion, Reza Kibria, professor of economics at Dhaka University, said the blockade is causing a loss of \$100-150 million every day, and it wouldn't be possible to recoup the loss even in the next two years.

Moreover, people are losing confidence in politicians, he added.

Termining the present situation dangerous, the speakers said it might destroy all the achievements the country has made so far in economic and social spheres.

Huda said dialogue is essential and it must start at the earliest possible time as both the ruling Awami League and the BNP-led alliance are taking hard lines.

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DELHI ELECTION

Exit polls forecast Modi party defeat

REUTERS, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces his first state election defeat since sweeping to power last year, according to yesterday's exit polls which showed a resurgent anti-corruption party, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), on track to win a majority in New Delhi's assembly.

A defeat for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Indian capital would harm his chances of consolidating power in parliament, where his reform agenda is being thwarted.

Modi needs to win most of the state elections over the next four years to gain control of both houses of parliament to deliver on his promise of jobs and economic growth.

The upper house, where his party is in a minority, is frustrating his efforts to pass laws related to tax and foreign investment.

The anti-corruption Aam Aadmi Party, or Common People's Party, is likely to win 38 seats in the 70-seat New Delhi assembly, according to the average of four opinion polls released on Saturday after the voting had ended.

The official results will only be published next Tuesday.

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TOP QUOTE

"Everyone has the democratic right to wage a movement. But do they have the right to burn and kill people?"

CM SHAFI SAMI
FORMER ADVISER TO
CARETAKER GOVT

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