

SPOTLIGHT

THE FARMERS' AGONY

Sharif Hossain Nazmuddin, an entrepreneur who has been fish farming for years in his 5 fishponds at Chandpur shared his struggling experience. Sharif says, "I used to supply Rui, Katal, Telapia and Koi fish to the local markets and to the wholesalers. During the days of hartals and blockades, I could not hire trucks to carry my goods to the selling points. A huge amount of my stock remained unsold. At one point my own supply of fish food was exhausted and size and weight of my fish decreased. So I took the desperate measure of hiring ramshackle three wheelers (locally called Nasimon) to transport my products. These vehicles are slow and unreliable and

reduced my supply rate at least down to 10 percent. So, my product quality had suffered and I had to sell the products at minimum price."

Sabbir Hasan Nasir, who is the Executive Director of ACI Logistics Ltd, faced a similar situation. He has been maintaining the logistics and supply chain of Shwapno, one of the country's largest departmental stores. Nasir says, "The effect of hartals and blockades was severe. Farmers could not supply their goods in a timely manner and the stocks of daily commodities were almost worn out. Thanks to our storage facilities, we have provided our customers with quality products even during days of crisis."



# THE AFTERMATH

SINCE 6 JANUARY 2015, THOUSANDS OF VEHICLES HAVE BEEN LYING IDLE IN DIFFERENT BUS STANDS OF THE CAPITAL. OWNERS FEEL PARANOID THINKING THAT THEY MIGHT FACE A SWIFT ATTACK ON THEIR BUSES, TRUCKS AND LORRIES, SO THEY PREFER NOT TO TAKE OUT THEIR VEHICLES ON THE HIGHWAY.



MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN and ANANTA YUSUF

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

Thousands of rural farmers had no such storage facility. Potato farmers of Bogra had to sell their crops at a nominal price in the local market as they could not send them to other districts. Dairy farmers of Pabna had dumped their products on the road to show their protest against this manmade economic deadlock. Still no measure has been taken to save the country from this calamity in the future.

DISRUPTED LIFELINE

The textile and garment industry is one of the main sources of Bangladesh's economic growth. But the loss it has suffered during the recent hartals and blockades is quite difficult to recover from. Fahima Ameen, a young garment industry owner says, "Our industry is heavily dependent on transport. Supply of raw materials heavily reduced during these days. We had to transport our finished products at great risk and with outrageously increased transport fares. We also suffered huge loss in getting new consignments from foreign buyers. Several of our buyers have returned from the airport without even entering the country because of the security risks. It has destroyed our reputation and has transferred many large consignments to our competitors in Vietnam."

SMALL BUSINESS FALLS APART

Sitting on a street of Dhanmondi, Kazi Muktar, a street vendor has been running his business for the last twenty years. When he was young, he used to find that the street food held a huge market in Dhaka city. "It is delicious and affordable," he comments. Muktar has been following the same routine ever since he started his business. A visit to Kawran Bazar early in the morning to collect his cooking materials is a part of that. But it has not looked the same in the past three months. Because of the continuous hartals and blockade, the availability of many raw items like fish and vegetables has become irregular. "Every month, I need to pay a rent of taka five thousand for my shop and spend around Tk 10,000 to buy my raw materials. But the price hike and irregular

supply due to this political unrest has become a threat to my business."

Different small traders in New Market are also suffering because of this. A vegetable seller complains that even though the hartals have finally come to an end, consumers are not feeling safe to come and buy things from the market.

"Today's market is more competitive than it used to be a decade before, now consumers are exposed to different options like street vendors, super shops and online markets," Muktar says, "In situations like these, they prefer those options to a visit to a market." Most of

"These three months were more like a series of scary nightmares, says Faruk Talukder Sohel, President of BBTOA. "Most of our owners have lost their business. Transportation of goods across the country has been largely affected."

He also adds that strikes are synonymous to uncertainty, which alone can destroy the economy of our country.

OPINION

Renowned economist and political activist Professor Anu Muhammad explains the impact of the month-long hartal and blockade and suggests a

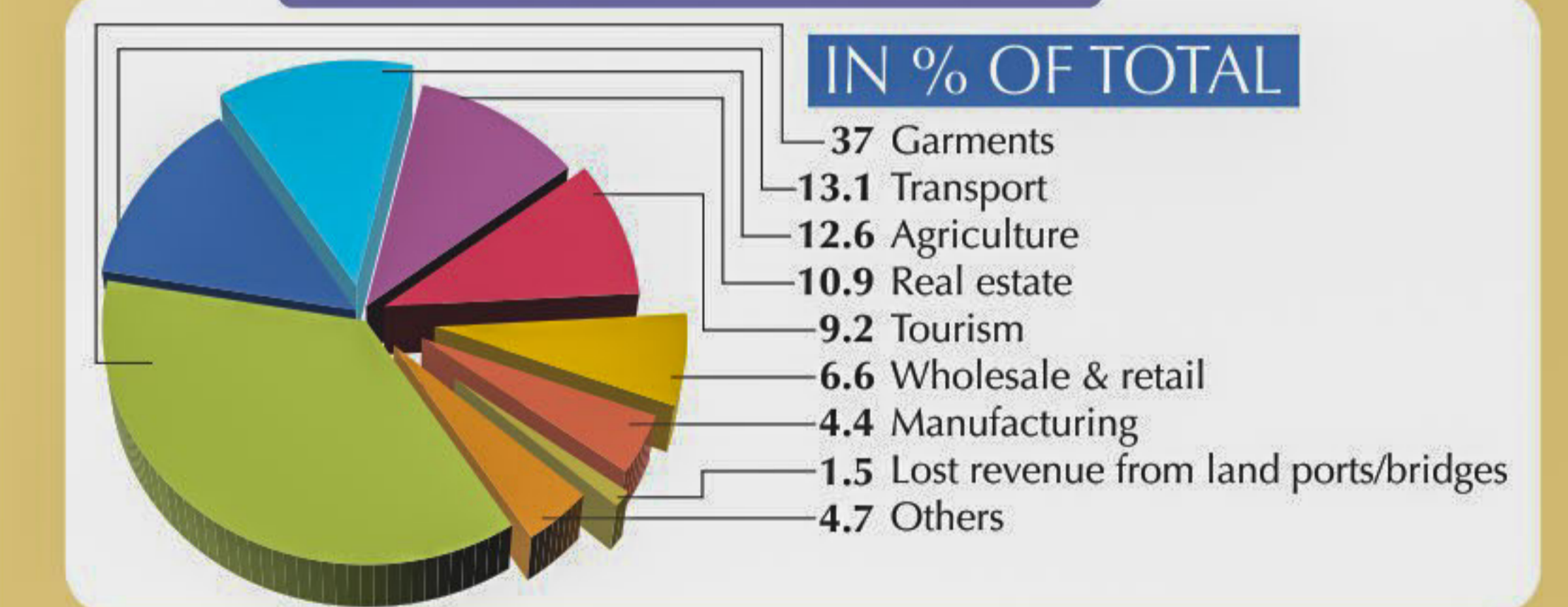


Sabbir Hasan Nasir



Sharif Hossain Nazmuddin

## LOSSES PILE UP



the sellers are living on the money that they had saved in the last few years, and they are afraid that if the situation does not change, they need to think of an alternative business to help them survive.

"With a family of six, I really don't know what awaits us in the next few months," he concludes.

TROUBLE ROAD

Since 6 January 2015, thousands of vehicles have been lying idle in different bus stands of the capital. Owners feel paranoid thinking that they might face a swift attack on their buses, trucks and lorries, so they prefer not to take out their vehicles on the highway.

According to the Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association (BBTOA), over 1800 vehicles have been torched and vandalised in last few months.

pragmatic solution. According to him, "Calling general strikes is a democratic right but the problem in Bangladesh is that the political parties are not obeying the rules of general strikes and committing violent activities. The ultimate sufferers of the recent continuous strikes and blockades are the common people. But hartals have become a part of our political culture. Formulating a law to ban hartals will not be effective. There are no alternatives to lessen the impact of these hartals without raising a debate about democracy. Ruling parties should not think that they must be in power forever. Opposition parties also should not think that they must go to power by hook or by crook. A democratic political space and solution through dialogue is essential to save the country's economy from the clutches of violent political activities."