



The traffic situation remains normal in Chittagong city's Dewanhat area yesterday although Jamaat-e-Islami called a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal protesting the Supreme Court's rejection of party leader Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahed's review petition on the death penalty he was given for war crimes. Inset, policemen frisk a motorcyclist in the city's Dewanbazar amid stiffened security.

PHOTO: STAR

Matia critical of biofuel use

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury has criticised the policy recommendations of various international organisations to use biofuels and questioned the feasibility and sustainability of using them to attain food security.

Delivering a keynote speech on "Evolution of Food Policy" at the 40th anniversary of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington DC Wednesday, Matia showed how the expansion of biofuels use had led to massive diversion of maize to ethanol production, reducing the maize supply for consumption as food, and thus causing the maize price to rise rapidly.

A sharp increase in land for maize cultivation has also resulted in reduced soybean and wheat cultivation, she added.

"It is quite ironic that some multinational corporations still promote biofuels as an eco-friendly and sustainable alternative to fossil fuels when 2,500 litres of water are required to produce a mere one litre of biofuel," the minister said.

Although Bangladesh has made good progress in agriculture and economic growth, the country is increasingly facing challenges of population growth, climate change impacts and vulnerability to domestic and international price shocks, she added.

Government leaders, agriculture scientists and economists from the USA, the UK, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Australia, Chile, Brazil, Ethiopia, China, India and Pakistan attended the conference, split into different working sessions on food security, agriculture and nutrition, market, trade and macro-policies.

CWasa raises water rate

Aggrieved residents demand improved services instead, fear corresponding rise in house rents

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Residents of the port city are unhappy with the Chittagong Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (CWasa)'s decision of increasing the water rate by five percent from January 1, 2016, after a gap of just one year.

CWasa approved the proposed water rate on November 7, said sources.

Some tenants told The Daily Star that they were worried because their house owners might raise the house rents correspondingly with the hike in the water charge.

Amir Uddin, an associate professor of Chittagong University and a resident of the city's Agrabad Muhuri Para, pointed out that instead of addressing the water crisis in areas where CWasa could not supply enough water as per the demand, it was raising the charge.

CWasa now charges Tk 7.25 per thousand litres, and the rate will be increased to Tk 7.61.

When asked, AKM Fazlullah, managing director of CWasa, said their production cost had been increased

due to hikes in the gas, fuel, electricity and labour costs.

He said that on the basis of the cost, Tk 9 would have been the reasonable rate but only after considering the public's financial condition they decided on the five percent rise.

According to sources, CWasa can now fulfill 42 percent of the total water demand and about 88 percent of the total supply goes to households. As a result, many government and non-government agencies, schools, colleges do not have an adequate supply of water.

The toilets of Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH), the largest public hospital in the division, often remain without water, causing sufferings to people.

C M C H Director Brig Gen Khondakar Shahidul Ghani said the hospital needed 1.5 lakh gallons of water per day while it got only 40 to 50 thousand gallons.

Prof Sikander Khan, president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa), Chittagong, said people did not know what actually CWasa was doing to

address the water crisis; except for installations of some pipelines, no progress was seen in the last few years.

In a release sent to the media on Sunday, the Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB) demanded that the decision be retracted.

Contacted, SM Nazer Hossain, member of CAB's central executive committee, said the hike would particularly affect the middle and low income groups who were already struggling with the price hike in daily essentials.

Moreover, there will be a huge rise in meter tampering and illegal supply lines to dodge the increased bill, he added.

Admitting that CWasa's services were not up to the mark, its managing director said, "We have paid attention to reduce the system loss...our system loss stands at 17 percent whereas the system loss in Dhaka is over 35 percent and in Karachi it is 40 percent."

He assured that CWasa would be able to meet 70 percent of the water demand by March next year, following the completion of the five-year long Karnaphuli Water Supply Project.

11 lakh expats yet to get MRPs

Five days to go before ICAO deadline, foreign minister tells parliament adding that 3,386 languishing in foreign jails

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 11 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates are yet to get Machine Readable Passports (MRPs) with only five days left to meet the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) deadline of November 24, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali told parliament yesterday.

According to ICAO rules, no Bangladeshi migrant will be able to travel abroad without MRPs after November 24 unless the UN agency that develops and suggests airline safety standards and practices extends the time. The deadline makes MRPs mandatory for all other nationals as well.

However, in the scripted reply, the foreign minister did not mention if it will be possible to issue MRPs among the rest of Bangladeshi expatriates. He said Bangladesh missions abroad had so far issued 21,15,901 MRPs, while Malaysian outsourcing firm IRIS issued 1,97,222 MRPs.

Besides, 54,540 enrolled MRPs have been waiting for printing by the Department of Immigration and Passport.

The foreign minister also mentioned that his ministry with its own funding had undertaken two projects to provide additional machinery and manpower to Bangladesh missions abroad to achieve the target within the stipulated time set by ICAO.

Replying to the lawmakers' queries, the minister also said some 3,386 Bangladeshis were detained in 29 countries on different charges and waiting for trials.

The minister said 912 Bangladeshis remained detained in Oman, followed by 409 in the UK, 391 in Saudi Arabia, 332 in Bahrain, 307 in Thailand, 207 in the USA, 180 in Greece, 158 in Myanmar and 107 in Singapore.

Besides, 97 remain detained in Mexico, 42 in Jordan, 39 in Hong Kong, 34 in Nepal, 30 in Japan, 26 in Iran, 24 in Turkey, at least 22 in Pakistan, 11 in Sri Lanka, 9 in Kenya, seven in Bulgaria, six in Mauritius, four in North Korea, three each in France and South Korea, two each in Belgium and Georgia, and one each in Sweden, Poland and Egypt.

5,455 Bangladeshi students studying in US universities

UNB, Dhaka

A record 5,455 Bangladeshi students studied at US universities during the 2014-2015 academic year, according to the annual Open Doors report on international educational exchange.

The total is more than double the number of Bangladeshi students in 2009-2010 (2,619 students).

"This record number of Bangladeshi students is a story of brain gain," said US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat.

"When I visit universities across Bangladesh, I can see the positive influence and impact of US university alumni. Millions of students in Bangladesh benefit from the knowledge their lecturers, professors, and vice chancellors bring back from the United States."

The United States remains the most popular destination for internationally mobile students, coming ever so close to the one million mark at 974,926 students in 2014-2015 with 10 percent growth from the year prior, according to the US embassy in Dhaka.

The Open Doors report is published annually by the Institute of International Education in partnership with the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

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Correspondent Zebun Nesa
Alo in the economic category, Prothom Alo Special Correspondent

Sharifuzzaman Pintu in politics, New Age Special Correspondent Khademul Islam in health, New Age Senior Staff Correspondent Md Moniruzzaman in law, parliament, judiciary and election commission, Samakal Staff Correspondent Abu Saleh Rony in Muktijuddho, Daily Observer Senior Reporter Pulak Chatkot in crimes and law and order, Inqilab Special Correspondent Samim Chowdhury in sports, Naya Diganta Senior Reporter Mehedi Hasan in education.

From electronic media, Channel-i Senior Staff Correspondent Zannatul Bakeya Keka, Maarsanga Deputy Chief Reporter Badruddoza Babu, Independent TV Business Editor Shahed Siddiqui, Channel 24 Senior Reporter Abdul Kaiyum Tuhi, NTV Senior Correspondent Mahmudul Hasan Guru, RTV Staff Reporter Al Amin Khan, Jamuna TV Special Correspondent Mahfuzur Rahman Mishu and NTV Senior Correspondent Rokon Uddin got the award.

The winners from online media are Jagone24.com Special Correspondent Moniruzzaman Uzzal, Banglamail24.com Staff Reporter Dipon Nondi, Banglanews24.com Special Correspondent Rahman Masud and Banglanews24.com Special Correspondent Rofiqul Islam Montu, Tawhidul Islam of ABC Radio and Ahrar Hossain of BBC Bangla jointly got the award.



Winners with guests at DRU Best Reporting Award giving ceremony at Shilpkala Academy in the capital yesterday. Twenty-seven journalists, including four from The Daily Star, got the award in 25 categories.

PHOTO: STAR

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