



An official of Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection and law enforcers check expiry dates on medicine packets at a pharmacy in Dhaka's East Tejguri Bazar yesterday. Assistant Director Abdul Jabbar Mondol of the directorate conducted the drive at drug stores in the area, confiscated expired medicines and fined the errant owners. Inset, a pack of medicine that expired in January 2015.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Police foil secondary school teachers' demo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Secondary school teachers agitating for regularisation of their contractual jobs, could not start their pre-announced hunger strike yesterday due to police obstruction.

Under the banner of Additional Class Teachers' (ACT) Association, several hundred teachers started to gather in front of Jatiya Press Club around 10:00am, but law enforcers drove them away, association leaders said.

Earlier around midnight, police had removed them from the area, where they took position since Monday morning, they alleged. "Many of us were injured and lost mobile phones and wallets when police launched the attack. We strongly condemn such attack on us at midnight, when we were asleep," said Mamun Hossen, general secretary of the association.

"In the morning, we tried to take position nearby, but police obstructed us," he added. The association decided to hold a press conference in the next two days to announce schedule for fresh movement.

The Additional Class Teachers (ACT) are

a section of secondary school teachers who were recruited under a World Bank-funded project -- "Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project" -- to improve students' math, science and English skills.

For a three-year tenure, the government recruited 5,200 such teachers in 2015.

The project ended on December 31 last year, but some 4,500 of them are still teaching, as government officials on various occasions assured them of making their jobs permanent, according to leaders of the association.

On Monday, they staged a daylong sit-in, demanding publication of a gazette regarding regularisation of their jobs, and announced to go for an "indefinite" hunger strike from yesterday.

Contacted, Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said the teachers were "not given permission" for demonstration, which was why police drove them away.

"Besides, the prime minister has a programme at Chankharpool today. For that reason, security has been beefed up in press club area," he added.

He, however, denied the "midnight attack".

HC wants list of doctors absent at work

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday asked the authorities concerned to submit a list of doctors who have been absent in their workplaces in different upazila health complexes across the country.

The High Court bench of Justice Moeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Md Ashraf Kamal asked the health secretary and the director general of Directorate General of Health Services to submit the list in the form of an affidavit within six months, after holding hearing on public interest litigation.

It also issued a rule asking the authorities to explain in four weeks why it shall not declare "inaction" of the government to ensure regular appearance of doctors.

No scope to amend new laws before election: Quader

Decision on polls-time govt on Oct 26

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There is no scope to amend the much-debated Digital Security Act and Road Transport Act before the next general election, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

Quader, also the general secretary of ruling Awami League, said this while replying to questions at a press briefing at his secretariat office in the capital. The briefing was arranged to respond to contemporary issues.

From a human chain on October 15, the Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council), a platform of editors, demanded proper amendments to nine sections of the Digital Security Act within the last session of the current parliament for the sake of independent journalism and freedom of expression.

Both Law Minister Anisul Huq and Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu had earlier said time for discussion on the law was not over yet.

But yesterday, Quader said, "There is no scope for such amendment in this tenure of the government... However, we will keep watch so that the law is not misused. We will do it seriously...."

The last session of this parliament started on October 21 and will end tomorrow. "The law was not enacted for journalists... Why are you in fear if you do not commit any offence?" he added.

ROAD TRANSPORT ACT
On Monday, Bangladesh Road

Transport Workers Federation announced that it will enforce a two-day work abstention from October 28 if their eight-point demand, including bringing amendments to the Road Transport Act 2018, is not met.

Asked about their demands, Quader said there is no question of amending the law within the tenure of the government.

The minister said the law has been enacted after holding discussions with transport leaders for three years.

"I have asked them to refrain from movement. The government will bring changes to it if required," he added.

POLLS-TIME GOVERNMENT

Quader said Awami League will take final decision over the formation of the election-time government at a joint meeting of its central working committee, advisory council and parliamentary party on October 26 at Gono Bhavan.

He said one or two more ministers might be included in the cabinet from main opposition Jatiya Party, even if the current cabinet is trimmed down. The new ministers will be from members of the parliament, the minister said.

Quader said the situation before the last parliamentary election was different, and thus the cabinet was downsized. But, in other democratic countries, the size of a polls-time government remains the same.

Ecneec okays Tk 4,489cr project to buy 35 dredgers

20 other projects also approved

BSS, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved a project to procure 35 dredgers at a cost of Tk 4,489.03 crore to maintain navigability of 100 major rivers.

The approval came from the 11th Ecneec meeting of the current fiscal, held at NEC conference room with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said a total of 21 projects were approved yesterday with an overall estimated cost of Tk 19,778.73 crore.

Of the total, Tk 17,316.93 crore will come from the government, Tk 233.93 crore from the organisations' own funds while the rest will come from project assistance, he said.

Of the 21 projects, 19 are new while two are revised ones.

The planning minister said Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) under the shipping ministry will implement the project to procure dredgers by June 2023. The government would provide fund for the entire project.

According to the shipping ministry, at least 1,655.10 lakh cubic metres of river routes are required to be dredged annually, while the overall dredging capacity of the country is 846.50 lakh cubic metres.

Once the project is implemented, it will be possible to meet around 70.81 percent of the annual dredging capacity of the country.

The Ecneec meeting also approved the Land Acquisition and Utility Transfer Project: Support for the Improvement of Dhaka (Kachpur)-Sylhet-Tamabil Highway into four-lane, and construction of separate service lanes on both sides with Tk 3,885.72 crore.

'But we're not employees here'

Workers at DMCH deprived for years hopeful of regularisation at new burn institute

BISHAKHA DEVNATH and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Abul Kalam dabs a wet swab on a baby's right arm, unperturbed by the infant's scream in pain from burns. His experienced gloved hands run quickly and carefully from the child's elbow down to his fingers as he dresses the wounds.

Within minutes, the 10-month-old's sobs have trailed off into feeble groans at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). Triumphant, Abul speaks encouragingly to the child and his mother.

The 36-year-old is deployed at the dressing room, a few steps from the entrance on the left. Seeing him at work on Monday, it was hard to imagine he was a man without any technical education; a man who has studied only up to eighth grade.

Abul is one of 68 "irregular employees" who have been working without pay at the burn and plastic surgery unit for between five and 15



years. This is a way of self-employment of sorts for them, as they subsist on tips from patients and their attendants.

These irregular employees include peons, cleaners, ward boys, operation theatre attendants, dressers and electricians.

"We report to our ward masters

every day as our shift starts. Our rosters are prepared as it's done in case of a regular [paid] employees," said Jibon Mia, an electrician.

There is an official procedure deciding who would do what, when and where; one thing that is absent officially is paychecks for the 68 who serve burn patients seven days a week and 365 days a year, except for any personal emergency.

Then again, patients and their relatives often allege that they are pressured to pay the irregular staff for services that are supposed to be free at the government facility.

Now that a new burn institute is about to be inaugurated today close to the existing facility, these irregular staffers are pressing the authorities to regularise them.

The new institute has sought an estimated 2,100-strong staff, including doctors, nurses, technicians and cleaners. On several occasions, the irregular employees had been given assurance that they would be

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LUXE AT *Baridhara*

PROJECTS AT BARIDHARA

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