

# 48-hr transport strike in Ctg starts tomorrow

Workers call it to protest alleged extortion by MP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A transport workers' federation has called for a 48-hour transport strike in greater Chattogram from 6:00am tomorrow, protesting alleged extortion by Chattogram-4 lawmaker Didarul Alam.

The Chattogram chapter of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation (BRTWF) called for the work abstention alleging Didarul demanded a monthly extortion fee of Tk 2 lakh from Chattogram Human Hauler Owners Association, an associate body of BRTWF Chattogram, read a press release.

Osman Ali, general secretary of BRTWF central committee, of which former shipping minister Shajahan Khan is the executive president, claimed the regional committee called for work abstention protesting physical torture on its leaders.

Didarul assaulted Oli Ahmed, secretary of BRTWF Chattogram, and Khursad Alam, joint secretary of Chattogram Human Hauler Owners Association, after they had refused to comply with Didarul's demand, alleged Mohammed Musa, president of BRTWF Chattogram.

MP Didarul has long been trying to take over Chattogram Human Hauler Owners Association to accommodate his supporters, Musa alleged.

The association controls the vehicles of route-8, under which human haulers run between Alonkar intersection and Sitakunda.

Contacted, Didarul denied the allegations and said he summoned the leaders of Chattogram Human Hauler Owners Association because vehicle owners alleged that the association collected extortion fee from each vehicle.

"The vehicle owners complained that the Chattogram Human Hauler Owners Association collects Tk 3000 per month from each vehicle as extortion fee. I just wanted to know the reason. But nothing else happened there," he claimed.

Didarul said the people, leading Chattogram Human Hauler Owners Association and BRTWF Chattogram, were involved with BNP and had cases filed against them in 2014.

Meanwhile, Greater Chattogram Sarak Paribahan Oikya Parishad, another transport organisation, rejected the strike in a press release on Saturday evening saying the crisis could be resolved through discussion.

## BPL

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chase of 152, Frylinck hit two sixes to tie the match before failing to connect with the last ball for the winning run, ensuring the first-ever Super Over in the history of the BPL. He then bowled that Super Over, from which Khulna needed 12 runs, fantastically to ensure that Chittagong would win. Thus, Khulna remain winless with four losses in a row while Chittagong won their second of three matches.

However, the second match was not nearly as dramatic as Dhaka Dynamites posted a comfortable 32-run win over Sylhet Sixers despite in-form Nicholas Pooran's rain of sixes. Pooran smashed nine sixes during his 47-ball 72 before pacer Rubel Hossain removed the West Indian to bring relief for his side.

Earlier Dhaka rode on Rony Talukdar's 34-ball 58 to reach 173 for seven.

The day's BPL affairs began with the drama of the first match, followed by the news of spinner Aliss Al Islam being cautioned after being reported by umpires for illegal bowling action during his heroics for Dhaka Dynamites against Rangpur Riders on Friday, but ended with a dull affair in the second match.

## Italian

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After the special infusion, the crispy fried air is placed on a bed of cotton candy, which Dinato hopes will remind patrons of clouds.

Fried air has been making headlines online for over a month now, mostly because Feva Restaurant allegedly charges \$30 per serving. However, according to an employee of the restaurant who commented on an article about the dish, wrote that fried air is actually offered for free to all guests, as a welcome. He also called it a "provocation to frivolity."

"I always serve it as an appetizer to remind my clients that they always have to try and find their life with real experiences," chef Dinato told Tribuna di Treviso.



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addresses a joint meeting of Awami League Advisory Council and Central Working Committee at the party's Bangabandhu Avenue central office in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

# Join JS for sake of democracy

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including "lack of proper leadership, anti-independence destructive politics, organisational weakness and nomination trading".

"They [BNP-led Jatiya Oikyafront] have to accept the polls defeat as they were incapable of picking their leader and lost people's support due to politics of killing. The BNP lost the election because of running the party by a fugitive leader," she said.

Yesterday, Hasina also asked her party leaders to take initiatives to strengthen the AL.

She also assured the central AL leaders, who were deprived of party nominations in the December 30 national election, of

evaluating them, said party insiders.

Hasina said the most notable aspects of the December 30 polls was the enthusiasm of voters, especially of the youths, new voters and women, in casting their votes.

She mentioned that the election was very much peaceful although BNP-Jamaat alliance "snatched ballot papers and boxes in some places and hatched conspiracies to foil the election".

"But they failed and the BNP suffered defeat in the election...this is their failure... they have to blame themselves for this."

The PM said although the BNP suffered the defeat due to "lack of leadership", the scenario might have been

better had they not "indulged in nomination trade".

Expressing gratitude to the people for having confidence in the AL once again, Hasina said this victory has increased the party's responsibility to the people a lot.

"We've only one thing [in mind] that we've to implement all our development programmes to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the people. We've to think what type of programmes we would take up to improve the lifestyle of the people."

The PM said the government would celebrate the golden jubilee of independence and the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from March 2020-

March 2021 locally and internationally.

She thanked the people to give the AL the opportunity to celebrate the two big events staying in the government.

About the government's future plan, she said rural people would get urban facilities. "The country's socioeconomic condition is improving and it will continue. The income disparity will be reduced, the fate of the grassroots people will be improved...we're taking programmes keeping these issues in mind."

Hasina hoped the peaceful situation would prevail in the country and Bangladesh would march forward by maintaining peace.

# People spent 9pc more on rice

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Hike in price of essential goods affect their lives. It creates a gap between the rich and poor," he said.

The price of different varieties of rice, which is a staple, soared to 8.91 percent higher in 2018 than the previous year.

For instance, prices of fine variety of rice, miniket, rose 5.67 percent year on year reaching Tk 62.25 per kg in 2018 from Tk 58.91 the previous year. Prices of nazir shail, another fine variety, shot up 13.17 percent to Tk 71.94 per kg last year from Tk 63.57 the previous year, according to CAB data.

On the other hand, the price of coarse rice fell by 15 percent in December 2018 compared to its price in the same month of last year.

The price rose due to re-imposition of 28 percent import duty on rice in June last year, said the CAB.

Increase in rice production resulted in prices reaching satisfactory levels towards the end 2018, it added.

Apart from rice, consumers in the city also had to pay more to buy fish, vegetables, eggs, spices, liquid milk, meat as well as various essential non-food items including soap, sari, house rent and water.

Average prices of laundry soap rose by 20 percent irrespective of brands while cost of beauty soaps rose by 18.59 percent last year, according to

the CAB.

Additionally, due to high import duty, consumers had to pay \$14,223 million or about Tk 1.14 lakh crore more in fiscal 2017-18, the report mentioned. The average import duty in Bangladesh was 25.64 percent in 2017, which was much higher than in other South and Southeast Asian countries.

Significant reduction of import duty would be a logical step to encourage industrialisation, increase in employment and provide products to consumers at reasonable prices, it said.

## LOWEST COST RISE IN NINE YEARS

The cost of living for more than 1.7 crore dwellers in the city rose by six percent last year, which is 45 basis points higher than the annual average inflation of 5.55 percent at a national level.

This was the lowest spike in the cost of living in nine years since the year 2009 when living cost rose 6.19 percent.

In 2017, the rise was 8.44 percent, according to CAB data.

Talking to the The Daily Star over phone, Rahman said CAB estimated the spike in living costs based on increase of expenditure on the same amount of essential commodities and services of a family between two years.

At the press conference during the unveiling of the report, he said Bangladesh had made significant progress on different development indicators. However, there was no alternative to keep living cost at bearable stage so everybody could enjoy the fruits of development.

According to the CAB report, the price of most essential goods remained largely "stable" in 2018 with a downward trend of price of rice and some other goods towards the year end.

Last year, prices of gas, electricity and energy fuel, as well as government-fixed bus and train fares, remained unchanged while prices of edible oil and power milk were largely stable, it said.

In the report, CAB also emphasised implementing existing laws and regulations for upholding consumer rights.

It further praised app-based ridesharing services in the capital and stressed the need for bringing those under a legal framework to protect consumer rights.

It also made a number of recommendations to the government, including establishing a consumer affairs ministry and procuring rice directly from the farmers to make people's living cost bearable.

Responding to a query, Ghulam, a former Anti-Corruption Commission

chairman, said although the report was based on the capital city, it also reflected people's living condition in other parts of the country.

"People's income has increased over the years. However, such increase was not equal for all. Those who did not have a six percent income increase had to face hardship in their daily living due to a rise in living costs," he said.

A rise in income was essential for improving living conditions while rise in costs also had to be satisfactory, he said.

Ghulam also said price hike of different goods was unacceptable and the government should closely monitor the market to stop such hikes and take effective measures against unscrupulous people and rackets.

The CAB report also mentioned the service-seeking consumers in banks had to count losses due to reduction of interest rate against deposits, hike of interest against bank loans, and imposition and increase of different service-charges.

The amount of default loans rose to about Tk 1,00,000 crore in the country due to corruption in the process, unwillingness of a section of borrowers to return loans and legal limitation in loan recovery which put depositors and small-scale borrowers at risk of counting financial losses, the report said.

# Taking Jamaat men along to polls a mistake

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Oikyafront]. When I gave consent [to contesting the polls under the alliance's banner], I was not informed about Jamaat. I think you can call it a mistake," he told journalists.

Around 70 leaders from the Gonoforum's central committee participated in its first meeting after the 11th parliamentary polls. It began at 10:00am and concluded around 3:45pm.

The meeting was organised to discuss the party's next course of action following the election.

The Awami League-led grand alliance won the polls bagging 288 out of the 299 seats. The election to the remaining seat of Gaibandha-3 will be held on January 27.

The Jatiya Oikyafront won eight seats, including six for the BNP and two for the Gonoforum.

Twenty-two Jamaat leaders contested the election with the "sheaf of paddy", the BNP's electoral symbol. One of the framers of the country's constitution, Dr Kamal had earlier been criticised for allowing Jamaat leaders to take part in the polls under Oikyafront's banner.

Jamaat-e-Islami had opposed the country's 1971 Liberation War and its top leaders were involved in crimes against humanity.

The BNP has claimed that whoever contested the election with the "sheaf of paddy" symbol were candidates of their party, not of Jamaat's.

The AL said that one of the reasons for the Oikyafront and the BNP's defeat in election with a margin so huge was that they allowed Jamaat leaders to participate in it.

Jatiya Oikyafront rejected the election results, alleging widespread polls irregularities and rigging. They also demanded fresh polls following a national dialogue with all stakeholders.

The AL rejected the demand.

After Gonoforum's meeting, Dr Kamal told reporters that he never did politics along with Jamaat and would not do so in the future either.

"My position is clear. We never did politics along with Jamaat nor [are we] thinking of doing so in the future. Whatever you've said about our politics involving Jamaat, we were not aware of it," he said.

When asked what the Gonoforum's position would be if the BNP did not sever its ties with the Jamaat, he said, "We will talk about it if it happens."

Gonoforum General Secretary Mostafa Mohsin Montu said their party forged the alliance with the BNP, not with the 20-party or the Jamaat.

He said, "We raised our objection when the 22 Jamaat leaders were nominated to contest the election with the 'sheaf of paddy'. The BNP's secretary general told us they [the Jamaat leaders] were nominated as BNP candidates."

Asked whether his party's two elected MPs would take oath, Montu

said they would discuss it and decide later.

At the meeting, he said their leaders discussed the post-election atmosphere and worked out their party's future course of action.

Montu said their leaders strongly believe that to wage a democratic movement in the days to come and to "restore democracy", there was no other alternative to national unity.

Dr Kamal said there was no disagreement among the people regarding the formation of the parliament through a fair and acceptable election.

"No one apart from the ruling party spokesmen are saying that a fair election was held on December 30, while there is no scope for saying it. I don't think it's a big deal to resolve such a problem. The government should hold a fair election within two to three months, enabling everyone to cast votes in the interest of the country and the constitution."

"People should be given a chance so that they can cast their votes as per their will. If you get the majority of the votes in a fair election, it'll be meaningful. If a government is formed through a fair and credible election, it will be easier for it to discharge its duties properly."

Speaking to The Daily Star, several Gonoforum leaders who were present at the meeting said they discussed the strengthening of the Oikyafront in such a manner that no one can "malign its reputation because of the

Jamaat and the BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman."

The meeting also decided to hold its central council on March 23 and 24.

## France tells Iran to stop ballistic missile work

REUTERS, Paris

France on Friday called on Iran to immediately stop all activities linked to ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear weapons after Tehran said it could put two satellites into orbit in the coming weeks.

"France recalls that the Iranian missile programme (does) not conform with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231," Foreign ministry spokeswoman Agnes von der Muhll told reporters in a daily briefing.

"It calls on Iran to immediately cease all ballistic missile-related activities designed to carry nuclear weapons, including tests using ballistic missile technology."

Von der Muhll was responding to comments by President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday, who said two satellites would be sent into space using Iran-made missiles.

## Seeking solution

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"We sought adequate security from the government so that owners can open their factories without fear," he said.

After the meeting, two representatives from the owner's association said their biggest worry was possible cancellation of work orders and the high cost of air shipment.

More than 100 factories have been affected so far by the unrest, said Siddiqur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

In some factories, production fell due to the weeklong protest. This needs to be resolved immediately, he said.

"We have been demanding a review of the basic pay for all grades. But the committee agreed to adjust only the pay for grades 3, 4 and 5 as major 'mistakes' occurred in those while fixing the wages," said Amirul Haque Amin, president of the National Garment Workers Federation, who is also on the government-formed committee.

He feared that today's announcement may not bring complete normalcy in the sector.

"We have been asking the workers to go back to their workplaces as the government assured us of reviewing the wage in those grades, but they are not listening," Amin said.

Asked if it was due to the weakness of the union leadership, he said there were indeed some problems in the leadership. "We cannot say that we have control everywhere in labour leadership. There are some problems in our organisations."

Sirajul Islam Rony, a union leader and a former workers' representative to the wage board, echoed Amin's view.

"In many factories, workers returned to work. But in many places, they are still protesting. There are some misunderstandings among workers and labour leaders. The workers are going beyond our control," he told The Daily Star by phone.

Montu Ghosh, president of Garment Workers Trade Union Centre, said they requested the committee to increase the basic pay for all grades keeping in mind the expectation of the workers.

## PROTESTS ON

Workers continued their demonstration yesterday, vandalising at least 20 vehicles and 25 garment factories in different areas.

They also blocked different roads in the capital, Ashulia and Gazipur for hours causing traffic gridlock.

The protest began on January 6 over the wage gap.

In September last year, the government raised the minimum monthly wage for RMG workers by around 51 percent to Tk 8,000 from Tk 5,300. The new wage took effect in December.

But when workers drew their pay in January, they found a huge disparity, triggering the agitation.

On the third day of the protest, the government assured the workers of addressing the discrimination in a month. The workers, however, refused to leave the streets.

"We don't believe in assurances. We want implementation," said Momin Miah, who works at Alfa Knitting Wear at the capital's Shewrapara, while demonstrating in the area yesterday.

In Ashulia, workers vandalised at least 20 vehicles while demonstrating at different points of Dhaka-Tangail highway for about three hours since 9:00am.

At least 15 workers were hurt as police charged batons and used water cannons to disperse them.

A number of passengers were also injured when workers threw brick chunks randomly at vehicles.

Workers of at least 35 factories in Savar and Ashulia joined yesterday's protest, said Sana Shaminur Rahman, superintendent of Dhaka Industrial Police-1.

Eight platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh were deployed in the areas.

In the capital, workers vandalised at least five garment factories at north Ibrahimpur, Mirpur-14 and Kochukhet in the morning.

Workers also blocked roads at Technical Intersection near Bangla College, Mirpur-14 and Shewrapara.

In Tongi, workers vandalised at least nine factories in the morning. Five people were detained in this connection, said a Rab official.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia yesterday warned against creating anarchy centring on the protests.

"No one will be allowed to create anarchy over protests. Anyone or any quarter trying to capitalise on the situation will be brought to book," he said, adding that intelligence agencies have already been asked to look into it.

## Wealth info

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the land offices, from union parishad to the ministry, will have to submit their wealth statements within the timeframe," he said.

He further said that he would issue a gazette notification to make the order effective immediately.

All the land offices will be brought under closed-circuit camera coverage to ensure transparency in the sector, he said.

Respective officials, including the minister and secretary of the ministry, will monitor the overall activities to check corruption, he added.

"In case of land acquisition by the state, the deputy commissioners in person will pay compensation to the land owners," he said.

The minister also promised to go on surprise visits at different spots to stop all kind of irregularities.