

Truckers' strike

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Meanwhile, after Tuesday's inconclusive meeting, transport leaders were scheduled to hold a meeting with the home minister at his Dharmundi residence from 9:00pm yesterday.

Tajul Islam, member secretary of the Bangladesh Truck, Covered-van Goods Transport Owners-Workers Unity Council, which called the work stoppage, said that around 30 leaders would take part in the meeting.

The meeting was ongoing as of filing of this report.

ESSENTIALS GET PRICIER

Prior to the strike, a huge amount of vegetables had entered the capital's wholesale vegetable markets compared to other days.

"Usually, I bring one truck of pumpkins, but yesterday I brought two," said Mahfuz Islam, a wholesale pumpkin seller at Karwan Bazar.

As news of the upcoming strike spread, truckers, however, hiked their fares.

Another vegetable trader, Sayeed Khan, said he used to hire trucks from Jashore's Khajura at Tk 12,000 each, but yesterday he was charged Tk 15,000.

"I used to sell a kg of gourd at Tk 40, but yesterday I had to charge Tk 45 per kg," he said, adding the price would rise further as some of the goods would rot.

Humayun Alam, a Tejgaon-based agent of Molla Salt and Patya Super Salt, said he hired two trucks on Tuesday afternoon at Tk 13,500 per truck from Patya in Chattogram.

In the morning, the truckers refused to come.

"They finally came as I gave them Tk 40,000 per truck," Humayun added.

GOODS STUCK IN PORTS

Transportation at all ports across the country remained halted.

In Chattogram port, the loading and unloading of bulk cargoes and containers to and from the vessels continued, but delivery of import goods and containers, as well as transport of export-load containers from private inland container depots (ICDs), remained fully suspended.

Usually in a normal day, over 4,000 TEUs (twenty-feet equivalent units) of import containers are delivered from the port, but not a single truck could enter it since 8:00am yesterday.

Businesses feared prolonged disruption would badly affect the country's import and export trade.

Meanwhile, exporters fear they might miss deadlines for shipping around 850 export containers, which are scheduled to leave the port today. These could not even be sent to the port yesterday.

Not a single export-laden container could be sent to the port from the 19 private ICDs, said Md Ruhul Amin Sikder, secretary of the Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association.

Mahfuzul Hoque Shah, former

director of Chattogram Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), said if the transport disruption continued today, the port would face serious container congestion. The loading and unloading activities would also slow down, he added.

Transportation of goods to and from the Bhomra land port in Sathkira, Hili land port in Dinajpur and Burimari land port in Lalmonirhat also remained halted.

Sohrab Hossain, Public Relation Officer of Hili land port, said goods-laden trucks came to Bangladesh from India, but those were not allowed to ply on domestic routes.

Businessmen said importers would face huge losses if the goods remained stuck at the port.

No goods were released from Benapole Land Port either due to the strike.

Businessmen said as a major portion of raw materials for the country's garment industries and factories, along with fruits, ginger and powdered chilly, are imported from India through the land port, its partial suspension in activities would hamper supply and production of many goods if the strike was prolonged.

Every day, the target of revenue at the port was Tk 25 crore, but yesterday only Tk 8.25 lakh was earned. As no goods were delivered from the port, there was terrible backlog.

Around 500 trucks used to carry goods to and from the land port every day.

GARMENTS COUNTING LOSSES

The RMG owners fear they may have to go for costly air shipments to send their products on time, as they could not send their goods to Chattogram port from Dhaka due to the ongoing strike.

"Trucks could not leave for Chattogram, which is the biggest worry as it will lead to air shipments if we miss the cut off time. If this goes beyond today [Wednesday], we will be in a big financial mess," said Sharif Zahir, managing director of Ananta Group, a leading garment exporter.

Facing troubles in transporting goods, Zahir is now negotiating with his buyers for extending the shipment period of the consignments.

"We will try for extension first. If not, [we will go for] air shipment," he said, adding, that air shipment cost usually cost up to 40 percent of the value of the goods being sent.

"Any disruption without a heads up puts strain on business," said Sheikh Fazle Fahim, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the country's apex trade body.

"All of them [garment exporters] are complaining. Even buyers are getting stuck during factory visits!" said Rubana Hug, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).



Transport workers demonstrate blocking Dhaka-Chattogram highway in the capital's Signboard area yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

UN calls on Nicaragua to end repression after church attacks

AFP, Managua

The UN called Tuesday on the Nicaraguan government of President Daniel Ortega to halt persistent repression after his supporters stormed Managua's Catholic cathedral and another church to attack protesting opposition hunger strikers.

A pro-government mob broke in on Monday and injured a priest and a nun while attempting to dislodge activists demanding the release of political prisoners, church authorities in Managua said.

The Catholic Church has a powerful role in the country but President Daniel Ortega has accused bishops of supporting deadly anti-government protests that rocked the country last year.

The priest and nun were attacked when they attempted to block the group from taking control of the cathedral, according to an archdiocese statement.

Reconciliation

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and Security" at the UN headquarters on Tuesday.

He emphasised on the necessity of a robust enabling environment in Rakhine underpinned by a dialogue between the Rohingyas, rest of the Myanmar society and the Myanmar authorities.

Momen recalled Bangladesh's successful experience of reconciliation in the Chittagong Hills Tracts in 1997 under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He also mentioned Bangladesh's contribution, through peacekeeping, to national and local reconciliation strategies in countries emerging from conflicts.

The permanent representative called upon Myanmar to promote active

participation of women and young people and ensure accountability and justice for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, said the Bangladesh Mission at the UN on Wednesday.

Momen also urged the Security Council to promote sustainable peace in Myanmar's Rakhine State through reconciliation and reintegration of Rohingya community into Myanmar society.

The UNSC has to encourage Myanmar to address core grievances and ensure unhindered and safe passage of relevant personnel and supplies to the Rakhine, he added.

The Open Debate was held under the presidency of the UK UN Secretary-General António Guterres also spoke on the occasion.



Firefighters spraying water to extinguish a blaze, inset, at Rajdhani Super Market in the capital yesterday evening. It took over an hour to douse the fire.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

People left in the lurch

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Drivers of such alternative transport took this opportunity to charge passengers with high fares.

Protesting transport workers assaulted some other drivers who had tried to operate their buses defying the strike.

Several hundred buses and trucks were seen parked at different bus terminals and intersections in different districts as the strike began its third consecutive day.

In the capital, the numbers of buses and trucks were low all throughout yesterday.

A workers' leader, preferring anonymity, said many bus drivers and helpers did not operate fearing penalty under the new law as their driving licenses and other related documents were not updated.

He also alleged that some agitating workers vandalised some vehicles and assaulted drivers who tried to operate their vehicles in the capital's Tejgaon area.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader at a programme in Noakhali yesterday called upon transport workers to refrain from making commutes suffer.

Our correspondents from different districts reported on the struggles that commuters were facing due to the strike.

Vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Sylhet highways was halted for around eight hours yesterday as workers blockaded the Dhaka-Narayanganj Link Road in Signboard area around 6:00am.

Transport operation resumed around

2:00pm as they withdrew the blockade, however a four-kilometre-long tailback was created. Some people opted to commute on foot, while others had to pay extra money if they chose another mode of transportation.

"I paid Tk 100 to travel from Signboard area to Jatrabari on a van, whereas the bus fare is Tk 5-10," said Alok Saha, an insurance company employee.

Shakil Ahmed, a student of Dania College, said, "I have an exam at 1:30pm. I got out of home in Shimail area at 11:00am. Now, I cannot get any transport. I will have to walk to reach my college and give the exam."

On the other hand, bus operation on the Dhaka-Mawa Highway remained halted since morning. A similar situation prevailed at the Shimulia Ferry Terminal area. Many commuters faced trouble after reaching the terminal on launches from southern parts of the country.

Many who crossed the border and entered Bangladesh struggled due to the transport crisis.

"Me and my six-member family came to Bangladesh today [yesterday]. But we could not get any transport to go to our home in Tangail. Today, we will stay at a hotel and will try to catch a train tomorrow," said Rohit Chandra Das, 50, who came to Bangladesh through the Burimari border of Lalmonirhat.

Aklima Begum, a resident of Narail, was on her way to Khulna Medical College Hospital to visit her grandson yesterday. Due to the unavailability of

buses, she got on an easy bike and van after crossing the Bhairab river and then managed to reach Phulbari Gate in Khulna.

In Pabna, several hundred passengers were seen waiting for buses at the town's main bus terminal yesterday noon. However, due to a lack of buses, there was a mad rush whenever one approached.

"I have been waiting here for a bus for around an hour and half but I could not get on. Whenever a bus came, people rushed to get on. I cannot even reach the door due to the huge crowd as I have a baby with me," said a woman, who was looking for a bus to go to Sathia upazila.

The Bangabandhu Bridge, which connects Dhaka to southern districts, looked almost deserted as there was barely any vehicular movement on it, said workers at the bridge.

Besides, commuters also suffered in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Kurigram, Chapainawabganj, Jhalakathi, Faridpur, Pirojpur, Cumilla, Noakhali and Tangail.

Workers' leaders in most of the districts said they would continue the strike until their demands are met and they get the directives from the workers' central committee in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Passengers' Welfare Association in a press statement yesterday urged transport workers to withdraw their strike immediately considering public suffering.

(Our district correspondents contributed to the report.)

Onion flown in from Karachi

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On Tuesday, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said the government decided to import 50,000 tonnes of onion by cargo planes.

The ministry booked a number of cargo flights of different airlines to import it.

Onion prices began to rise across the country about two months ago when the Indian government imposed a ban on its export. But the prices started to rise sharply last week.

Earlier this month, locally grown

onion was sold at Tk 100-120 a kg in the capital's kitchen markets. But the price jumped to Tk 160 late last week and then kept rising.

The price rose by Tk 30 to 40 a day and hit a record Tk 260 per kg. Against such a backdrop, the government decided to import onions by cargo planes.

Market monitoring teams from the commerce ministry and different divisions as well as government agencies punished traders for their alleged involvement in manipulation of onion prices.

In the last couple of days, the teams had imposed fines and handed down different jail terms to the offenders.

The prices started dropping three to four days ago after locally grown onions and the ones imported from Myanmar, Egypt and China hit the market.

Locally grown onions were being sold for Tk 170-180 per kg and the imported ones for Tk 120-160 a kg.

Traders fear that onion prices may rise anytime soon if the ongoing transport strike continues for a few more days.

Major polluters far off climate targets

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Programme (UNEP) executive director Inger Andersen.

As well as UNEP, the report was produced by the Stockholm Environment Institute, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, the Overseas Development Institute, and the CICERO Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research and Climate Analytics.

It created a new metric called "the fuel production gap" highlighting the difference between rising production and the decline needed to restrict global warming, reported Reuters.

The gap was largest for coal, with countries planning to produce 150% more in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting warming to 2C, and 280% more than would limit warming to 1.5C.

"The continued expansion of fossil fuel production - and the widening of the global production gap - is underpinned by a combination of ambitious national plans, government subsidies to producers, and other forms of public finance," the report said.

\$7.9 TRILLION BY 2050

Climate change could directly cost the world economy \$7.9 trillion by mid-century as increased drought, flooding and crop failures hamper growth and threaten infrastructure, new analysis showed yesterday.

The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Climate Change Resilience Index measured the preparedness of the world's 82 largest economies and found that based on current trends the fallout of warming temperatures would shave off three percent of global GDP by 2050.

Its analysis, which assesses each country's direct exposure to loss as climate change brings more frequent extreme weather events, found Africa

was most at-risk, with 4.7 percent of its GDP in the balance.

In general, developing nations fared poorer in terms of resiliency than richer ones.

"Being rich matters," John Ferguson, EIU country analysis director, told AFP.

"Richer nations are really able to be more resilient towards the impacts of climate change, so this really threatens growth trajectories of the developing world as they try to catch up with the developed world."

"When we are already dealing with global inequality, for the impacts of climate change the developing world's challenges are much greater," he added.

Of the countries evaluated, Angola stood to lose the most - as much as 6.1 percent of gross domestic product.

The study put this down to a mixture of a lack of quality infrastructure, as well as its geographical exposure to severe drought, soil erosion and rising sea levels.

Land degradation in Angola would prove a "significant" economic hindrance, the report said, given that agriculture is its largest employer.

Nigeria (5.9 percent negative GDP), Egypt (5.5 percent), Bangladesh (5.4 percent) and Venezuela (5.1 percent) were the next most climate vulnerable nations identified in the analysis.

ACT NOW, AND LATER

The analysis said rising temperatures meant the global economy was projected to hit \$250 trillion by 2050, as opposed to \$258 trillion with no climate impact.

While the United States - still the world's largest economy at market rates - is forecast to be one of the least impacted, the EIU noted that President Donald Trump's policies represented a "temporary setback" in the climate fight.

Russia was predicted to lose five

percent of GDP by 2050 and will "suffer more than most other countries in the world from the negative effects of climate change", it said. This held true even when potential benefits in increased agriculture were taken into