

'Won't go home until our issues are resolved'

Resolute jute mill workers in Khulna, Jashore continue hunger strike; 29 hospitalised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

At least 29 jute mill workers fell ill from starvation and dehydration yesterday in Khulna, on the second day of the indefinite hunger strike being observed by thousands of workers -- and their family members -- of nine state-owned jute mills in the Khulna-Jashore industrial belt.

Around 31,000 people took position in front of the main gates of their respective mills -- Star, Platinum, Alim, Eastern, Daulatpur, and Khalishpur in Khulna and JJI and Carpeting in Jashore district since Tuesday.

"At least 29 workers fell sick and were sent to different hospitals including Khulna Medical College Hospital," said Sahana Sharmin, president of Platinum Jute Mill Workers' Union.

"We have proven our patience earlier, and we will follow a systematic demonstration. As a part of it, we started the indefinite hunger strike with the assistance and confidence of general jute workers," she added.

"We are yet to get a wage commission, that was announced in 2015," she further

said, adding, "The government is promising to consider all our demands, but we want a permanent solution."

Sahara Parvin, a worker of Star Jute Mill who took part in hunger strike, told The Daily Star, "I do not want to return home without a solution to the issues we have been facing for years."

Her seven-year-old daughter Ruhin Sultana was also seen taking part in the hunger strike with her mother at the mill gate.

This correspondent found big tents erected near mill gates on BIDD road in Khalishpur, where hundreds of workers took shelter with pillows and blankets to protect themselves from the cold.

A big tent was also seen in front of Crescent Jute Mill, the biggest jute mill in Bangladesh.

This correspondent spoke to worker Sobhan Miah (67), one of the frontliners of the demonstrations.

"If worker leaders fail to run the strike, I personally will go to the prime minister to draw her attention," said a determined Sobhan.



Jute mill workers continue their indefinite hunger strike in front of state-owned Crescent Jute Mill in Khalishpur area of Khulna for the second day yesterday.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

Ilias Kanchan gives Shajahan Khan 24hrs to apologise

UNB, Dhaka

Nirapad Sarak Chai (Nischa) founder Ilias Kanchan yesterday gave Shajahan Khan 24 hours to apologise for accusing him of embezzling foreign funds for his road safety movement.

He also threatened to take legal action against the former minister if he does not apologise or fail to provide any evidence supporting his claim within this time-frame.

He was speaking in a press conference at Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka.

Kanchan claimed Nischa does not get any financial support from abroad.

"For the first 12 years, we ran Nischa with our own funds and then registered it as an NGO in 2015. We run our operations through member donations," he said.

At a programme in Narayanganj on December 8, Shajahan, the executive president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, claimed that Kanchan received crores in foreign donations for Nischa.

He accused Kanchan of investing the money in several businesses and schools.

Death for Rajshahi war criminal

The 66-year-old was involved in torture and killing of freedom fighters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday found a Rajshahi man guilty of crimes against humanity committed during the 1971 Liberation War and handed down death penalty to him.

Convict Abdus Sattar alias Tipu Sultan (66), a member of Razakar Bahini in Boalia area of Rajshahi, had directly taken part in crimes, including abduction, torture and killing of freedom fighters, during the war.

"The accused has been found to have participated in conducting the attacks with extreme barbaric attitude, knowing the consequence and goal," the tribunal said, adding, "We did not find that the convicted accused expressed remorse of any degree..."

Sattar was also a member of Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of anti-liberation Jamaat-e-Islami, during the war, according to the prosecution.

He was arrested in May, 1972 under the collaborators order but was released in August, 1974. Sattar was

not arrested in relation to any charge brought against him in this case.

He passed BA (honours) in 1979 and MA in 1980 from Rajshahi University. The accused retired in 2011 as an assistant professor from Gopalpur Degree College in Natore's Lalpur.

The three-member tribunal led by its Chairman Justice Md Shahinur Islam and members Justice Amir Hossain and Justice Md Abu Ahmed Jamadar read out the summary of the 177-page judgement in presence of Sattar, his family members, prosecution, defence, investigators and journalists.

"The offences as crimes against humanity shocked the human conscience, precisely on account of their extreme and intrinsic gravity. The horrendous offences committed by the accused therefore gravely aggrieved all human beings, we conclude," reads the judgement.

Thus, these must be punished through appropriate sentence, in exercise of judicial discretion, it added. Through the verdict, Prosecutor

Mukhlesur Rahman Badal said both the prosecution and victim family members got justice.

Gazi MH Tamim, state-appointed defence counsel, however, said his client will challenge it with the Supreme Court.

According to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, a war crimes convict can file an appeal with the SC within 30 days from the date the verdict is declared.

The tribunals have so far delivered 41 verdicts against 95 people. Of them, 69 have been sentenced to death. None had been acquitted till now.

CHARGES AND CONVICTION

Sattar was handed down death penalty for taking part in abduction of one Babar Mandal, who was brutally tortured at Pakistan occupation army's torture camp set up at Shaheed Shamsuzzoha Hall of Rajshahi University. Mandal was shot dead on September 27, 1971.

The tribunal gave Sattar capital punishment for his direct participation

PM urges pharmas to produce leprosy medicine

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged everyone to shun negative attitudes toward leprosy patients. She instead recommended authorities concerned to take initiatives for their proper treatment.

"We have to discard the mentality that if anyone is afflicted with leprosy, the person should be isolated from society," she said while inaugurating the National Conference 2019 on Zero Leprosy Initiative by 2030 at the capital's Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel.

She urged local pharmaceutical companies to produce medicines for the disease. "If they [pharmaceutical companies] produce special medicines for leprosy and take measures to distribute them for free, we'll reach our target [of zero leprosy] very quickly," she said.

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease that mainly affects the skin, nerves and mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract and eyes, according to WHO.

WHO statistics state 3,000-4,000 new leprosy cases were detected every year from 2011-2017 in Bangladesh. Leprosy is curable and early treatment averts most disabilities.

Noting that once leprosy was considered a curse, the premier said institutions need to conduct further research to better understand the disease and prevent its spread.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque presided over the inaugural session of the conference. Chairperson of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination Yohei Sasakawa spoke on the occasion. Health Services Division Secretary Md Ashadul Islam delivered the welcome speech.



Two youths, wearing sandals, walk on the pedestal of Central Shaheed Minar while others either take selfies or remain engaged in chitchats. Though it is strictly prohibited by the High Court to do so in order to protect sanctity of the memorial for language martyrs, few apparently show the due respect, in addition to lax monitoring by the authorities concerned. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Harassment Allegation Chased off bus, man dies under wheels

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man died yesterday while jumping off a running bus in Chattogram, following accusations of harassing a female passenger.

The deceased was identified as Ismail Hossain (25) from Satkania.

Ismail was on the Patiya-bus near Shah Amanat Bridge area in the port city, when a female passenger started shouting, claiming that Ismail harassed her, said Nezam Uddin, officer-in-charge of Bakalia Police Station.

When other passengers started coming after him, Ismail jumped out of the running bus, fell under the wheels and died on the spot, said the OC.

Police detained the helper of the bus for quizzing, the OC added.

Mother, son killed in race between buses

STAR REPORT

The last two days saw five people die in three separate road accidents, report our correspondents and a news agency.

A woman and her four-year-old son were killed after they fell off a running bus at Shimultali area in Araihaazar upazila of Narayanganj on Tuesday night. The accident was caused by a competition between the bus carrying them and another bus, reports UNB.

The deceased were identified as Mansura (25) and Asif (4). Mansura was a teacher of Darul Uloom Rahmania Madrasa at Rahmatpur in the upazila.

The accident occurred around 8:30pm as the two buses were competing to get ahead. Mansura and Asif were standing next to the door of the bus, said police.

At one stage, the door slammed open, and Asif was flung onto the road from his mother's lap. Mansura fell off the bus trying to catch her son. They were killed on the spot when the other bus ran over them, Mozaffar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kanchpur Highway Police Station said.

Following the accident, the bus carrying them fell into a roadside ditch, he added.

On information, police seized the bus but its driver and his helper managed to flee the scene, the official added.

Meanwhile in Panchagarh, two people were killed in a motorbike accident at Nazrul Sarani on Tetulia-Banglabandha Highway on Tuesday afternoon.

The deceased are Anisur Rahman (28) and Rajib Islam (22). The cause of the accident is yet to be confirmed by police, reported our Thakurgaon correspondent.

Sub-Inspector of Tetulia Police Station Abdul Quader Jilani said locals found Anisur and Rajib lying on the road in critical condition around 3pm.

They were rushed to Tetulia Upazila Health Complex where the on-duty doctor declared Rajib dead. Anisur succumbed to his injuries on the way to Rangpur Medical College Hospital in the afternoon.

Police suspect that some speeding vehicle hit the bike and fled the scene.

In Rajshahi, a teenage on a bicycle was killed after being run over by a truck in the city's Bypass area yesterday, reports UNB.

The deceased was identified as Rakibul Islam (17), said Rajshahi Metropolitan Police spokesperson Golam Ruhul Kuddus.

Bus Service to Gangtok, Darjeeling Test run fails to start on time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The trial run for direct bus services on Dhaka-Gangtok and Dhaka-Darjeeling routes via Siliguri have been delayed by few days, according to officials.

The trial run was supposed to start from today but it could not happen as the government has not issued any necessary order in this regard yet, they added.

"The GO [government order] has not been issued. So, we are not starting tomorrow [Thursday]. It [trial run] may be delayed by one or two days," Ehsan Elahi, chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), told The Daily Star yesterday.

As per the plan, two buses with around 40 passengers including officials from both Bangladesh and Indian government, were supposed to leave Dhaka at 6am today and return on December 16.

A large number of holidaymakers seek direct bus services to Gangtok and Darjeeling as those are popular tourist destinations, according to government officials and bus operators.

Besides, many Bangladeshi parents send their children to boarding schools in Darjeeling and they make frequent visits to the area, they added.

Distance between Dhaka and Darjeeling via Siliguri is around 450-kilometre whereas distance between Dhaka and Gangtok via Siliguri is around 500-kilometre.

Currently, buses operate on five cross-border routes between Bangladesh and India -- Dhaka-Kolkata-Dhaka, Dhaka-Agartala-Dhaka, Dhaka-Sylhet-Shillong-Guwahati-Dhaka, Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata-Agartala and Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata-Dhaka.

CMP Day Police working to ensure sustainable security: IGP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

To achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the country needs sustainable security, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Dr Mohammad Javed Patwary said at the 41st founding anniversary of Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) yesterday.

At the programme, organised at the central playground of Dampara Police Lines, the IGP addressed the manpower crisis in the police force, saying "by ratio there's one police personnel for every 900 people."

"This is not enough, but we are still working to maintain law and order," he said. "As there is a manpower crisis, we have come to the people [citizens, politicians, and civil society] as you are our strength," added the IGP.

He also spoke of the resilience of the force. "Seventeen police personnel were killed and around 1,000 became physically disabled by terrorist attacks during the

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Audit Bhaban illuminated in red and green as Victory Day approaches. This photo was taken on Tuesday night in Kakrail area.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED