

Sust students resume their protests

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology have resumed their protest with an open discussion.

The programme took place on the campus's Muktamancha around 7:00pm yesterday, following the end of their hunger strike that began on January 19 demanding the vice chancellor's resignation.

At the discussion, the students expressed their opinions on what kind of institution they wanted Sust to be.

On Wednesday, they withdrew their barricades from the university's main gate, the vice-chancellor's residence and from all academic and administrative buildings.

As the barricades were removed, administrative work also resumed on the campus after 11 days.

On January 19 around 10:20am, 28 Sust students ended their hunger strike after 163 hours following the requests of former professors Muhammed Zafar Iqbal and Yasmeen Haque.

Of the 28, only two remained under treatment at Jalalabad Ragib Rabeya Medical College Hospital till yesterday. For other students, their families took responsibility for their treatment at home and in different hospitals.

A spokesperson of the protest said they handed over a five-point demand upon Prof Zafar Iqbal's request on Wednesday.

The demands are removal of Sust VC along with Students Welfare Adviser and the proctorial body; granting bail to the five detained alumni who donated money to the protestors and were sued on Tuesday; initiatives to keep all residential halls open at the moment; the withdrawal of the case that was filed against unidentified students; and to bear all medical expenses of students who were injured in the police attack and of those who were on the hunger strike.



Johura Khatun picks strawberries from her field in Dakshin Borama village in Gazipur's Sreepur upazila. Her family has been growing the fruit for the last 11 years, earning a good profit. Their success inspired many in their village to do the farming.

PHOTO: ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE AKAND

Viaduct links two ends of capital

Metro rail project sees major accomplishment as entire 20.1km structure visible with last segment installed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main structure of the country's first metro rail project was completed yesterday with the installation of the last segment of the viaduct, which now connects two ends of the capital – Uttara and Motijheel.

At 11:14am, the last segment was installed between piers 582 and 583 near the Jatiya Press Club, completing the entire 20.1-km viaduct on which the rail lines would be laid.

MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL), the implementing agency of the project, announced the completion of viaduct installation through an online press conference.

It took around 10 minutes to install the last girder, where national flags were attached, and officials and staffers both in the field and those attending the press conference applauded enthusiastically to celebrate the achievement.

Formally known as the Mass Rapid Transit Line 6 or MRT Line 6, the elevated rail line is being constructed between Uttara Sector-3 and Motijheel.

Commercial operation in the Uttara-Agargaon section will start on December

16 – the country's Victory Day – this year. The full section will be operational by December 2023, as per the DMTCL announcement.

Once operational, the metro rail will be able to transport 60,000 people per hour and reduce travel time from Uttara to Motijheel from about two hours to only 40 minutes.

The original cost of the project was Tk 21,985 crore but project authorities last year sought a further Tk 11,487 crore for additional work, including extension of the line up to Kamalapur and building spacious footpaths outside the stations for convenient entry and exit of passengers.

If the proposal for additional funds is approved, the cost of the fast-track project would be Tk 33,472 crore and deadline would be December 2025, one and a half years longer than the original one.

Asked about the cost escalation proposal, MAN Siddique said they would take measures for ensuring comfortable exit and entry of the passengers from the stations.

"We don't want to create anymore problem for Dhaka city," he said.

They will build several station plazas,

transit-oriented hubs (TODs) and expand the line to Kamalapur. So, a majority of the additional money would be used for land acquisition, he said.

Besides, the higher exchange rate of the US dollar and the rise of value-added tax and customs duty are the other major reasons behind the cost escalation, Siddique said.

Replying to a question, MAN Siddique said foreign consultants had earlier recommended keeping additional space at the station entrances for passengers' convenience.

"But we decided to build MRT first and address the issues. Now, construction of the MRT is at the last stage so we are now addressing the matter. We have time to address it [expanding space for entry and exit]," he said.

Siddique was secretary of Road Transport and Highways Division from November 2011 to October 2017, the period when the project was approved and detailed design was drawn.

Replying to another question, he said they hoped to withdraw all barriers on roads in Agargaon-Mirpur area, except for station areas, by April this year to reduce people's suffering.

8 injured in Ctg polls violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least eight people were injured in a clash between the followers of two rival chairman candidates at Khagaria Union Parishad polls in Chattogram's Satkania upazila yesterday.

According to police and locals, supporters of Awami League candidate Akter Hossain and independent candidate Jasim Uddin swapped on one another with guns and sharp weapons in Joraj Kul area around 11:30am.

On information, police rushed to the spot but both the confronting groups managed to flee the scene, said locals.

Sub-registrar office assistant jailed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A Kushtia court sent a female office assistant of Kushtia's Daulatpur upazila sub-registrar (land) office to jail yesterday.

The office assistant – Jannatul Ferdous Munni – was arrested with Tk 31,200 in cash on Wednesday night. She allegedly collected the money by taking bribes.

She was placed before District and Session Judge Abu Taher yesterday, said Al-Mujahid Mithu, lawyer of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Kushtia.

Kushtia ACC Assistant Director Neel Kamal Pal filed a case against the woman under 161 of the Anti-corruption law of 1947.

Woman becomes voter for 2nd time, sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A woman in Patuakhali's Bauful upazila has been sued for becoming a voter for the second time using a fake name and age.

Bauful Upazila Election Officer Arifur Rahman filed the case against Lucky Akhter.

Lucky changed her name to Samia and became a separate voter in 2017. She also received a government job at the family planning department using her fake documents.

Confirming the matter, Al Mamun, officer-in-charge of Bauful Police Station, said legal actions would be taken against the woman after proper investigation.

UP member, 2 others sent to jail for beating youths

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police arrested a union parishad member and his two cohorts on Wednesday for their alleged involvement in beating up three youths on theft charge in Mymensingh's Phulbaria upazila.

The arrestees are Tara Miah, 45, member of Enayetpur Union Parishad, Shamim Mia, 35, of Bedbari Majhrihat village; and Saidur Rahman, 35, of adjacent Kristapur village in Phulbaria.

Earlier, Md Abdul Motalab, one of the victims' father, lodged a case with Phulbaria Police Station accusing six persons including the arrestees on Wednesday.

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No impact on EU business

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would have an impact on business engagement in Bangladesh," he said.

The diplomat was responding to a question from a journalist at a Meet the Reporters event, hosted by the Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU), at its Nasrul Hamid Auditorium yesterday.

The European Union envoy said businesses pay attention to the overall picture in a country.

Whiteley said what matters to businesses is to do their business in a "good, clean and fair way" with a level playing field. "I think that's the primary concern. Sometimes, political developments can have an impact on businesses."

Ivan Stefanec, a member of the European Parliament (MEP), recently wrote to Josep Borrell, high representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy, seeking sanctions against Rab.

The envoy said the letter came from an individual MEP, not from the European Parliament as a whole.

Regarding Bangladesh's next general election, the envoy appreciated the government's "very open approach" towards foreign observers. He said the EU was keen to follow the polls closely.

"I would say we very much welcomed the statement by the foreign minister [AK Abdul Momen] the other day where he said

Bangladesh would welcome and have an open approach to any foreign observation missions that would wish to come and follow the elections," Whiteley said.

The ambassador did not comment on the US sanctions against Rab saying that it is a matter of the United States.

He said the EU expressed concerns about several human rights issues in Bangladesh, including an annual Human Rights Report, which is freely available online.

The European Parliament itself has adopted resolutions in the past on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, the diplomat said.

EC bill passed, snubbing all concerns

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Ahead of the general elections in 2014 and 2018, president picked CECs and other commissioners in 2012 and 2017 following recommendations by search committees.

As per the new law, the six-member search committee, to be headed by a judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, will recommend names to the president for the EC appointments.

The judge will be nominated by the chief justice.

The five other members will include a High Court judge, to be nominated by the CJ, the comptroller and auditor general, the chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission and two distinguished citizens nominated by the president. Of the two, one will be female.

The committee can propose two names to the president for the post of CEC. It can also recommend two persons against each of the commissioner's post.

The government move to enact the law came nearly 50 years after the constitution prescribed enacting a specific law for forming the EC.

It came when almost all political parties demanded a specific law in this regard during a dialogue with President Abdul Hamid.

The president initiated the dialogue with registered political parties seeking suggestions on forming an independent,

neutral and credible EC. The talks continued from December 20 to January 17.

A total 25 political parties participated in the dialogue while seven rejected it terming it meaningless.

Civil society platforms too demanded enactment of an EC law.

The current commission, led by CEC KM Nurul Huda, expires its tenure next month.

On multiple occasions last month, the law minister said there was no way to pass a new law for constituting the EC in such a short time.

He also said a law so crucial for the people cannot be passed "overnight".

But the government has been able to have it passed in parliament.

The law will come into force with the president's approval.

Even if the president approves it immediately, the search committee will have to finalise its recommendations in a hurry.

If the president forms the search committee on Sunday, it will get only 11 working days before the tenure of the EC expires on February 14.

WHAT MPS SAID
Several opposition MPs, including Jatiya Party's Fakhru Imam and Mujibul Haque Chunnur, BNP's Rumeen Farhana and Harunur Rashid, mentioned that Article 48 of the constitution says

the president shall act in accordance with the advice of the prime minister except for appointing the PM and the chief justice.

Harunur strongly opposed the bill saying the law was a ploy by the government to execute its new strategy for the next national election.

Lambasting the law minister, Rumeen said there would have been transparency had one representative each from the Awami League, the main opposition party, and the third-largest party (the BNP) was in the search committee.

She said according to the proposed law, the EC would be formed as per the will of the government and the prime minister. That EC will not be independent. It will be the ministry of election affairs of the government, she said.

JP's Shameem Haider Patwary said the proposed law says the president would appoint the CEC and other ECs, which contradicts Article 48.

"Therefore, everything, including the formation of the search committee and appointment of the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners, would be done as per the will of the prime minister."

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon proposed sending the names of the people picked by the search committee to the business advisory

committee of parliament. He said this would be inclusive.

Law minister Anisul Haq refuted the MPs' criticism.

On the allegation that two ECs formed through search committees were given amnesty by the proposed law, he said no one was given indemnity.

"Indemnity and legal coverage are not the same thing."

A discussion of the Left Democratic Alliance yesterday criticised the government for enacting the EC law. It said the aim of the law was to form a subservient EC.

The alliance announced countrywide demonstrations on Saturday to protest the law.

Participating in the discussion on the thanksgiving motion on the president's speech, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said accepting 22 different amendments on the law, brought by the opposition parties, meant that the proposed law was initiated by the BNP and all opposition parties in parliament.

"They told today [yesterday] that they don't know about the bill. But most of the amendments brought by all the opposition parties including JP, BNP, Workers Party, JSD and Gonoforum, were accepted. Therefore, it seems, it is the proposed law of the opposition," she added.

BNP must

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valedictory speech in the 16th session of the 11th Jatiya Sangsad.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury prorogued this year's sitting of the parliament after accepting unanimously the president's speech.

The maiden JS session of 2022 began on January 16 when President Abdul Hamid addressed the House as per the parliamentary practice.

China returns Indian citizen at disputed border

REUTERS, Beijing

China has returned an Indian citizen who "illegally" entered into Chinese territory at the disputed border between the two Asian giants, a military official said yesterday.

Yesterday's announcement from China came after India's Defence Ministry said last week it had contacted China to request that it locate and return a 17-year-old Indian, Miram Tarom, who had been "reportedly captured" by the Chinese military after going missing near the countries' shared border.

Kiren Rijiju, an Indian federal minister, said Tarom had been handed over to the Indian army at a border post in northeastern Arunachal Pradesh.

Housing facilities, more manpower sought

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ministry will take initiatives for all the proposed accommodation allotment.

Md Shahid Ullah Khandaker, secretary to

housing and public work ministry, Khorsheda Yasmeen, additional secretary of organisation and management division of public administration ministry, additional

inspectors generals of police, all metropolitan police commissioners, range deputy inspector generals and district police superintendents were also present at the meeting.

Dipu Moni bins graft allegation

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her brother sold the land.

Local union parishad Chairman Selim Khan and upazila Chairman Jahidul Islam are among the influential people who bought a large portion of the land forcibly ahead of the land acquisition

to pocket extra money as compensation, according to the newspaper report.

Asked whether she knew the matter, she said, "I was unaware of it. I only learnt about it from today's [yesterday] media report."

The minister admitted that the UP and upazila

chairmen have close political links with her.

Responding to a question from a journalist, the minister said she will raise the issue of some Awami League leaders spreading propaganda against her in the party forum.