



Tamanna Yesmin left her post at Harishankarpur level-crossing in Kushtia to join fellow temporary railway gatekeepers for their “fast unto death” programme, which enters its 8th day today. “We’ve been serving the railways for so long, do we not deserve some return?” a tearful Tamanna told journalists, demanding permanent status of their jobs.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Victims of administrative TOPSY-TURVY

Bureaucratic tangles keeping railway gatekeepers from getting permanent jobs

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Tamanna Yesmin, a temporary railway gatekeeper, was supposed to be working at Harishankarpur level-crossing on Kushtia section to ensure safe passage of trains.

But along with two-three hundreds of her fellow gatekeepers, Yasmin has been in the middle of a “fast unto death” for the last six days, demanding permanent status for their jobs.

But the railway authorities, for whom they have been working for more than four years, haven’t felt any obligation to visit the spot in front of Dhaka Divisional Railway Manager’s office beside Kamalapur Rail Station – where they’re fasting – to check up on them or provide them with assurances.

The protesting gatekeepers mentioned that their colleagues have been working extra hours to keep train operations normal.

“We’ve been serving the railways for so long, do we not deserve some return?” Tamanna told this correspondent yesterday, in a choked voice. She is one of 1,889 gatekeepers appointed under two railway projects that Bangladesh Railway (BR) took up to rehabilitate and improve level crossings.

They were appointed in early 2018 and provided Tk 14,450 (Tk 500 more for workers in metropolitan areas) as monthly salary without any rise in last four years. But the gatekeepers have been demanding that their jobs be



Over the last seven days, more than 100 temporary railway gatekeepers participating in the “fast unto death” have fallen ill, with six of them in critical condition.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

brought under BR’s revenue budget, claiming that the prime minister gave such directive at an Ecneec meeting.

Over the last seven days, more than 100 workers have fallen ill, with six in critical condition, said Al Mamun, a leader of the platform that organised the demonstration.

On the first day, Jahangir Hossain,

general manager (east) of BR, came to the spot and asked them to withdraw their programme, saying that a process is underway but it’s going to take time, said Mamun. However, the workers decided to continue as the GM didn’t provide a deadline.

While visiting the spot, this correspondent found around 200

workers present there. Some of them were sleeping, while an ambulance was seen taking two of them to hospital.

Tamanna, one of the 325 female gatekeepers, joined the demonstration on February 28. “Working as a railway gatekeeper is difficult for women. We tried to do our best, but now we’re passing uncertain days under open sky.”

WHAT IS BR DOING?

Around 70 percent of 1,412 authorised level crossings do not have dedicated staffers, according to recent BR data. Besides, there’s another 1,149 unauthorised level crossings which have no gatekeepers at all.

In June 2015, BR took up two projects – for its east and west zones – with a provision to hire 1,889 gatekeepers by outsourcing the recruitment process to an external company, sources said.

But as the project came across an Ecneec meeting, it directed BR to appoint the gatekeepers instead of hiring them through outsourcing as “sincerity and accountability is required for this job”.

After this, BR moved to appoint the 1,889 gatekeepers and completed all infrastructure-related work for it.

But when BR sent a proposal to bring them under the revenue budget, the public administration ministry rejected it – citing a 2004 finance ministry circular that prevents bringing project workers to the revenue budget.

In July 2020, the railways ministry re-sent the proposal. But the public

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Polls the only way to come to power Says agri minister

STAR REPORT

Agriculture Minister and Awami League presidium member Mohammad Abdur Razzaque yesterday said if BNP wants to come to power, they will have to join the polls.

“They must be elected by people. If people elect them [BNP], Awami League will leave power and welcome them,” he said.

The minister made the remarks while exchanging views with journalists at the council of Delduar upazila unit of AL on the upazila parishad premises, reports our Tangail correspondent.

Replying to a question on the price of daily commodities, the minister said price of coarse rice has remained stable and the price of fine rice is still a bit high. And the price of edible oil has risen a lot in the international market. “We have to meet the demand by importing edible oil,” he added.



Even darkness must pass Says Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said their party leaders and followers have been subjected to enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and various repressive acts.

“When I go to court, I don’t see any other people rather than the ones from our party. Many of them aren’t even our leaders. They’re only our supporters,” he said.

Jatiyatabadi Help Cell arranged the programme at Dhaka Reporters’ Unity (DRU) to provide financial assistance to the family members of some victims of enforced disappearance.

Besides, “Shaheed Nurul Alam Stipend” was

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‘All should have right to water’ Says Dipu Moni on Teesta

STAR REPORT

Education Minister Dipu Moni has expressed hope that Bangladesh and India would resolve the Teesta water-sharing issue.

“Our past and future are integrated and cannot be seen in isolation. As we understand each other deeply, if there is any problem in future, we will solve it on our own,” she told reporters in Kolkata on Friday.

She was speaking at an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh’s independence and the birth centenary of Bangabandhu at the 45th

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PRAYER
TIMING
MAR 6



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5-15	12-45	4-30	6-05	7-30
Jamaat	5-50	1-15	4-45	6-10	8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Visiting Sundarbans just got costlier

Local, foreign tourists and forest-dependent population to pay double fees

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

The government has revised fees in the Sundarbans after a decade, doubling it for both local and foreign tourists and for people whose livelihoods depend on it.

The decision came into effect from February 26 for the world’s largest mangrove forest, a Unesco declared world heritage site which tops the list of tourist attractions for its rich biodiversity.

The environment, forest and climate change ministry in a gazette notification informed of the decision, taken to increase revenue collection following approval from the finance ministry on December 26 last year.

In a revised decision, the per-day fee for local tourists in places except sanctuary is set at Tk 150 while the previous fee was Tk 70. Foreign tourists will have to pay Tk 2,000, from what used to be Tk 1,000.

The per-day fee for local tourists in

each three sanctuaries of the Sundarbans has been set at Tk 300, which would be Tk 3,000 for foreigners. Local tourists will have to pay Tk 300 per day for each camera, while foreigners will have to pay Tk 500.

Apart from this, the fee for unregistered tourist trawlers has also risen. It is now Tk 1,000 for a three-day package on unregistered trawlers and Tk 300 for the registered ones. Every boat or trawler will have to pay Tk 300 for a day’s stay in the Sundarbans.

The fee for collecting Sundori, Pashur, Kakra, Kaora, Bain, Geoya, Dhundol wood has been fixed based on their width. For example, collecting per quintal of golpata will cost Tk 60, which was Tk 25 earlier.

Forest-dependent population used to pay Tk 1,200 per quintal of sea bass. The cost has now doubled to Tk 2,400 per quintal. The revised fee for crab

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Debris, such as rocks and discarded materials, that have slipped within railway sleepers can lead to grave danger as speeding trains rush over them. To avert accidents of this kind, workers have been hard at work at the Tejgaon rail crossing, cleaning each section of the line with caution. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON