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RMG workers' protest for pay hike continues

Govt hints at forming wage board, issue ration cards for them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the garment workers continued their protests yesterday demanding pay increases, the government hinted at forming a minimum wage board to fix a new pay structure for them as soon as possible.

Former shipping minister Shajahan Khan gave the hint at a press conference in the capital's Srama Bhaban.

Shajahan, also a former workers' union leader, said the government would provide ration cards to workers soon to enable them to buy some basic commodities at lower prices as their prices have soared.

Before holding the press conference, Shajahan held a tripartite meeting of government high-ups, garment workers' union leaders, and factory owners to discuss the demonstrations by RMG workers and the way forward.

Shajahan, a ruling Awami League lawmaker, was tasked with holding the emergency meeting and press conference regarding the protests as State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Monnujan Sufian, secretary to the ministry and other senior officials of the ministry were now travelling abroad.

The lawmaker, however, did not give details of when and how the wage board would be formed and how the ration cards would be distributed.

He said he would inform Monnujan about the government's plan on ration cards and the new wage board upon her return from a meeting of the International Labour Organisation, now being held in Geneva, Switzerland.

Earlier, the minimum monthly wage of garment workers was raised to Tk 8,000 in December 2018.

The minimum wage was fixed at Tk 5,300 in 2013, up from Tk 3,000 in 2010. The figure was Tk 1,662.50 in 2006, Tk 940 in 1994 and Tk 627 in 1985.

Shajahan blamed the BNP and Jamaat for the workers' demonstrations alleging that the two parties were instigating the workers to take to the streets to dampen the joyous moment of the inauguration of the Padma Bridge, scheduled for June 25.

AGITATION CONTINUES

Garment workers staged protests in the capital's Mirpur and Uttara areas yesterday, demanding pay hikes as prices of daily essentials have shot up.

The demonstrations, which began on Thursday, entered fourth day yesterday after a day's break on Friday.

Witnesses said hundreds of workers took to the streets at Mirpur-10 intersection, Mirpur-13, Mirpur-14 and Kachukhet areas around 8:30am. Protesters blocked traffic at Mirpur-13.

ASM Mahtab Uddin, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Mirpur division), said police tried to drive the workers away, but they hurled brick chunks at them.

Law enforcers then used batons, fired sound grenades and teargas shells to disperse the workers, Mahtab told reporters.

The protesters retreated to alleys while police took positions on the main streets. The demonstrators left the alleys around 11:00am, said witnesses.

In Uttara, several hundred garment workers staged protests blocking part of the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Azampur area around 10:00am. Protesters hurled brick chunks at several buses. Police later fired teargas shells to disperse the workers around 11:00am.

Kamal Hossain, an RMG worker in Mirpur, said they were demonstrating peacefully, but police attacked them without any provocation.

Protesters also alleged that many of their fellow RMG workers were detained by police in the last few days.

Earlier, the minimum monthly wage of garment workers was raised to Tk 8,000 in December in 2018.



Cops rough up a garment worker after picking him up during a protest in the capital's Mirpur yesterday morning. The workers had been demonstrating for four days straight, demanding an increase in wages in the wake of price hikes of essentials.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

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Govt scraps Odhikar's registration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has cancelled the registration of non-governmental organisation Odhikar, amidst an ongoing legal battle in this regard.

One of the reasons given for the cancellation was publishing misleading information about various extrajudicial killings, alleged disappearances and murders. These, the government says, severely tarnished Bangladesh's global image.

The comments were made in a letter issued on June 5 and signed by Zinat Ara, the director of registration and audit at the NGO Affairs Bureau. This newspaper has a copy of the letter.

Odhikar is one of the few organisations that have routinely logged cases of enforced disappearances and published quarterly and annual reports detailing the incidents. They also support and mobilise the families of enforced disappearance victims.

Newspaper industry in crisis

Say speakers at a roundtable



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's newspaper industry is going through a crisis because of laws that restrict freedom of speech and the precarious state of the economy, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

In the last one and a half years, the price of newsprint, which is the paper used to print newspapers, spiralled from \$570 per tonne to \$1,050.

Together with the devaluation of the exchange rate and the

numerous taxes, the industry is in a bind, they said in a roundtable styled "Upcoming Budget: Problems and Crisis of Newspaper Industries" organised by the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB).

The main income of the newspaper comes from the advertisements, which have decreased since the pandemic, said AK Azad, president of NOAB.

On top of that, the newspapers have a Tk 100 crore

advertisement bill pending from the government.

The production cost of a Tk 10 newspaper is Tk 23, and of the Tk 10, the newspaper hawkers take Tk 4 and the publishers get Tk 6, according to Azad, also the publisher of Bangla daily Samakal.

The newspaper industry is different from the rest and its problems are longstanding, Azad said.

"We explained the VAT and tax issues to the NBR [National

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Untimely death of a dream

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

She lost her mother at six.

Life was hard but she never gave up. In time, she finished her graduation with outstanding results.

The girl, Puja Sarkar, finally became a scientist at Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Around two years ago, she started her new journey after tying the knot with Tanmoy Majumder, a doctor. They were expecting a baby soon.

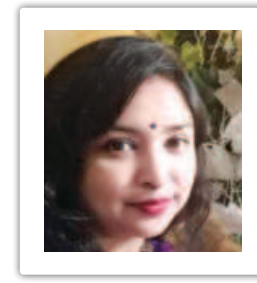
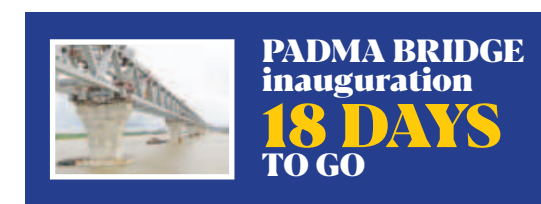
"But everything has been taken away in a minute," said Puja's father Amal Sarker.

Puja is one of the three young scientists of BAEC who died in a tragic accident in Savar on Sunday. The driver of the bus they were in also died.

"As my daughter was deprived of the love and care of her mother, she struggled hard to reach this stage of her career. We are speechless," he told The Daily Star last evening.

Puja's uncle Subrata Nandy, who lives in Canada, wrote a heart-wrenching piece titled

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PADMA BRIDGE
inauguration
18 DAYS
TO GO



PHOTO: REUTERS

A firefighter extinguishes a fire at a warehouse following recent shelling during Ukraine-Russia conflict in Donetsk, Ukraine yesterday.

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MASS MEDIA BILL JS body gets 60 more days to scrutinise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on information and broadcasting ministry was yesterday given 60 more days to scrutinise the much-debated Mass Media Employees (Services Conditions) Bill 2022.

Hasanul Huq Inu, chairman of the committee, sought the time in parliament, which unanimously approved it.

On March 28, Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud placed the bill and it was sent to the parliamentary standing committee for scrutiny.

According to sources at

Transparent sub launches in Vietnam

CNN ONLINE

A groundbreaking submersible has welcomed passengers on its first ever public dives in a hugely significant move for submarine tourism.

The Triton DeepView 24, built by Florida-based luxury submersible company Triton Submarines, finally launched at the Vinpearl complex in Hon Tre Island, Vietnam, last month, two years after it was delivered. The 24-seat vessel, which can reach depths of up to 100 metres (328 feet), features a transparent acrylic hull, providing an incomparable underwater



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