

Lighterage workers call off strike after 14 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

Bangladesh lighterage workers' union called off their strike yesterday as the authorities promised to meet their demands.

Around 14 hours after calling the strike, the union leaders announced withdrawal at 7:30pm following a three-hour long meeting with Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) Chairman M Shahjahan.

Nabi Alam, vice-president of Sorbostorer Noujan Sramikbrindo, said they decided to withdraw the strike as CPA chairman assured them of cancelling the lease of Charpara Ghat to a firm.

The union announced the strike to press home five-point demands on Thursday.

Their demands included the suspension of the CPA chairman, cancellation of CPA's lease of Charpara Ghat used by the lighter vessel workers, suspension of OC of Patenga Police Station, the survey of vessels to be done at Parky Char area, and preparing an estuary of the Sangu river for the anchorage of lighter vessels by dredging.

Unloading of imported bulk goods from bigger vessels to lighter vessels at the outer anchorage and transport across the country was suspended since 6:00am yesterday due to the strike.

Around 1,800 lighter vessels are engaged in the goods transport from Chattogram on inland water routes.

The problem ensued over leasing a ghat built by CPA at Charpara of Patenga in the port city for the usage of the lighter vessel workers to get on and off the coast.

Earlier, hundreds of lighter vessels used to wait upstream of the Karnaphuli river before going to the outer anchorage of Chattogram port for loading imported goods from larger vessels.

Later, as per CPA's instruction, the waiting area was moved and these lighter vessels were kept near Patenga

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Vessels sit idle at Chattogram city's Majhir Ghat yesterday morning during a strike enforced by lighter vessel workers. The strike was withdrawn in the evening after the Chattogram Port Authority assured workers of meeting their demand for cancellation of the lease of Charpara Ghat, which is used by workers.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

MYANMAR, SOUTHEAST ASIA Rising crime posing regional, global threat Says a report of US Institute of Peace

PORIMOL PALMA

Increasing incidents of crime in Myanmar and across Southeast Asia, and an explosion of human trafficking for labour are becoming a regional and global security threat, says a new report of the US Institute of Peace.

"Reports since July [this year] have uncovered the emergence of vastly increased criminal activity in remote areas of Myanmar," said USIP, an American federal institution, in the report published on November 9.

This is relevant to Bangladesh as human trafficking of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis from the shores of Myanmar

and Bangladesh to Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia became a serious issue when mass graves were discovered in Thai and Malaysian jungles in 2015.

Besides, trafficking of illegal drugs, notably methamphetamine or yaba, from Myanmar to all its neighbouring countries has risen alarmingly since the 2017 Rohingya influx in Bangladesh.

According to the home ministry data, police across Chattogram division seized 2.59 crore pills of yaba, which is a sharp rise from 34.76 lakh in 2016 and 1.2 crore in 2018.

Myanmar, which is historically known as a producer of opium, shifted its focus on the synthetic drug trade since the

military coup in Myanmar in 2021, said Dhaka University International Relations Prof Imtiaz Ahmed.

USIP report said the criminal activities in Myanmar also got a new lease after the military coup.

"Lawless enclaves have also emerged in Cambodia and Laos. Crime networks in Cambodia alone have lured an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people into slave-like conditions beyond the reach of law enforcement. In Myanmar, the number could be two to three times higher," said the USIP report titled "Myanmar's Criminal Zones: A Growing Threat to Global Security".

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Journo dies in tree felling accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A journalist died after a tree, being cut by locals, fell on the motorcycle he was riding on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Moulvibazar Sadar upazila yesterday.

Bikramjit Barman, 25, a resident of Bharaura area of Sreemangal, was a local correspondent of Bangla TV.

Bikramjit died on the spot in Mokambazar while his seven-year-old son, who was also on the motorcycle, got seriously injured, police said.

Additional Superintendent of Police Ziaur Rahman said the guidelines for felling trees by a highway were not followed at the site.

"We will investigate and take legal action," he added.

Deceased in Maldives fire identified

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh High Commission in the Maldives yesterday revealed the identities of the two Bangladeshis, who were burnt to death in a devastating fire in the island country on Thursday.

They are Asia Begum of Pirpur village in Dhanbari, Tangail; and Uzzal, of Bishnupur area in Panchbibbi, Joypurhat.

Another Bangladeshi, who suffered serious burns, is now being treated at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Tyob, said Sohel Parvez, the first secretary at the high commission.

"The injured is still unconscious," Sohel told The Daily Star, adding that the high commission was working with the Maldives authorities to send the bodies to Bangladesh.

A total of 10 foreign workers were killed in a fire that broke out at an automobile workshop in M Nirulehi area.

No Covid-19 death for fifth straight day

BSS, Dhaka

No death from Covid-19 was reported yesterday for the fifth straight day.

However, 48 coronavirus positive cases were reported.

"Bangladesh reported 1.97 percent Covid-19 positive cases as 2,434 samples were tested," a daily statement of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said.

In 24 hours, the combined figure of coronavirus infection in Dhaka district and the capital was 25.

The official tally showed that the virus killed a total of 29,426 people and infected 20,36,109 so far, the statement added.

The recovery count rose to 19,83,424 after another 166 patients were discharged from the dedicated hospitals during the last 24 hours.

No fear of famine

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AL advisory council member Amir Hossain Amu, and its presidium members Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Jahangir Kabir Nanak also spoke at the event.

JL Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash presided over the rally, moderated by its General Secretary Mainul Hossain Khan Nikhil.

Earlier in the day, the celebrations started with the rendition of the national anthem. Singers Momotaz Begom, also an AL lawmaker, and Pantha Kanai and actor Chanchal Chowdhury, among others, took part in a cultural programme.

Thousands of activists of JL, AL

and other associate bodies started to throng the venue since morning. With banners and festoons in their hands and wearing colourful t-shirts and caps, they gathered through small and large processions.

Meanwhile, at least eight people including a cop were injured in a clash that took place around 2:00pm at the venue.

Injured police constable Kabir Hossain, 25, said two groups hurled brickbats at each other at the southern part of Suhrawardy Udyan, following an altercation over entering the venue.

JL General Secretary Mainul said they were not aware of any clash. "We are looking into the matter," he added.

Meanwhile, JL president of Bakshimail union in Rajshahi, Jinnat Ali Harun, 48, died after falling ill at the venue, confirmed Assistant Sub-inspector Masud of DMCH police outpost.

Because of the rally, commuters in the capital had to suffer much due to lack of transport as ruling party men had already reserved many buses to go to the venue, according to bus drivers.

JL was founded by Sheikh Fazlul Haque Mani under the direction of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through a youth convention at the Institution of Engineers on November 11, 1972.

Now \$2b loan talks with WB begin

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programme. Hopefully, that will sway the World Bank to make the triggers easier," said an official on the condition of anonymity.

The reforms agreed upon with the IMF pertain to creating additional fiscal space, containing inflation and modernising the monetary policy framework, strengthening the financial sector, boosting growth potential and building climate resilience.

For the DPC, the WB has set 12 conditions that encompass reforms in fiscal policy and the financial sector and setting guardrails to future shocks, according to documents seen by The Daily Star. The government is yet to meet any of the conditions.

"We are hoping to revise down the triggers," he added.

One of the conditions is getting the cabinet to approve the National Tariff Policy, which would bring down the tariffs and simplify the tariff structure.

The commerce ministry has approved the framework for the policy, including institutional responsibilities and implementation arrangements.

Should the government implement the policy by the next fiscal year, Bangladesh's average nominal tariffs on imports would come down to 25 percent from the existing 29.6 percent.

Rolling out the automated challan system for deducting income tax at-source in all tax zones across the country by fiscal 2023-24 is another condition put forth by the WB.

The move would bolster the National Board of Revenue's collections from income tax and value-added tax by as much as 64 percent to Tk 244,200 crore.

The WB also called for full implementation of the e-Government

Procurement system, which would bring down the average procurement lead time (from invitation to contract award) to 50 days from 70 days at present.

For that to happen, the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA) Act must be enacted to consolidate the responsibilities and authorities of the BPPA.

The Department of National Savings must adopt an automated system to link the issuance of the General Provident Fund and the Contributory Provident Fund instruments to national identity cards.

This would bring down the net sales of costly savings instruments by as much as 52 percent by fiscal 2023-24 from Tk 41,960 crore in June last year.

The WB has called for reforms in the banking sector that complement the policies agreed upon with the IMF.

Amendments to the Bank Company Act to strengthen the supervisory framework in line with good international practice, recovery plan for undercapitalised banks and strengthening corporate governance in state banks in line with global best practices are the demands of the WB.

Modernising the financial system infrastructure to global standards by adopting the Payment and Settlement Systems Act 2021 and the Secured Transactions Act are the other triggers for the loan.

The Payment and Settlement Systems Act 2021 will enable simplification and streamlining of the licensing framework for payment service providers and payment system operators, replacing the convoluted and, at times, inconsistent list of license types (mobile financial services, electronic money issuers, payment service providers, agent

banking).

The enactment of the Secured Transactions Act will allow both tangible and intangible movable property to be used in secured transactions, which will improve access to financial services for Bangladeshi firms, including micro, small and medium enterprises.

The WB's programme is also aimed at strengthening the country's resilience to future shocks.

One of the conditions for budget support is expanding cash transfer programmes this fiscal year by more than five times to cushion the poor from the brunt of the elevated price levels at home and abroad.

Cash transfers of Tk 24,040 crore must be made to the mobile financial service accounts of the reclassified list of beneficiaries by the ministry of social welfare.

Another condition is the use of the National Household Database for beneficiary identification by major social protection programmes.

The WB has also called for allowing private sector players in power transmission projects.

Raising power generation from renewable energy sources to 1,000 megawatts by June 2024 is another condition placed by the WB.

Adoption of the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan figures high in the WB's agenda, too.

This plan includes retrofitting the built environment, following the National Building Code 2020, to ensure sustainability and to make sure the buildings are safe against disasters and emergencies.

A retrofitted built environment and more resilient infrastructure will ensure that negative impacts on the poor from disasters can be reduced, particularly in Dhaka where construction practices will be particularly relevant.

BNP's big day in AL stronghold

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didn't hold a party post, but decided to attend the rally because he believed a change of government would improve the current situation.

"Life has become very difficult, and it's now almost impossible to survive as the prices of essentials are skyrocketing.

"The ruling party brought out a procession in the town today [yesterday] to thwart our programme. However, despite their plan, thousands of BNP leaders and activists will participate in the rally," he added.

Meanwhile, AL leaders said their rally was part of a protest against the BNP's previous efforts to destabilise the country through carrying out

various subversive activities like arson and vandalism.

Over 8,000 leaders and activists from Faridpur district AL and its associate bodies brought out the procession from Sheikh Russell Square and it headed towards Brahmo Samaj Road, where they held a rally in the afternoon.

Speaking at the event, Shamim Haque, president of Faridpur district AL, said, "We the soldiers of Sheikh Hasina believe in peace. We will not obstruct the BNP's rally. Rather, we will help the administration so that it can be held successfully."

He said the AL would stay alert and foil any attempts to create chaos in Faridpur town.

Sumon Ranjan Sarkar, additional superintendent of police in Faridpur,

told reporters that police patrol was increased in the town to maintain law and order.

Besides, police yesterday set up check posts at various entries to the town, including Rajbari junction, and the intersections of the Dhaka-Khulna and Dhaka-Barishal highways.

Meanwhile, commuters in Faridpur town suffered yesterday amid the 38-hour bus-minibus strike which began in the morning.

On November 7, Faridpur transport leaders and workers announced the strike, demanding a ban on three-wheelers on highways.

Similar strikes were enforced ahead of the BNP's recent rallies in Barishal, Mymensingh, Khulna, and Rangpur as well.

Fardin might have been killed in Chonpara, N'ganj

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raided Chonpara slum around 4:00pm yesterday.

Police said the drive was conducted to arrest a suspected murderer of Fardin.

However, no one was arrested in the raid.

The DB, which is investigating the

murder, has already done forensic tests on the slain Buet student's phone and found important information, police sources said.

About a newspaper report that Fardin went there to buy drugs, three of Fardin's classmates and a senior at Buet told The Daily Star that the

report was not true.

"Why would he go to buy Phensedyl a day before his exam?" asked one of his friends.

"In the last three years, I never even saw him smoking," said Saadman Sakib, a third-year student of civil engineering at Buet.

38hr strike leaves a dist almost cut-off

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strike, their leaders and activists have been pouring in from around the district to join the divisional rally.

Meanwhile, the movement of all buses, including that of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), remained halted in the district.

Passengers were seen waiting for public transport at the busstands, and in front of Faridpur Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College from

8:00am to 9:30am.

Many had to wait for hours while others returned home with their luggage after failing to get any transport.

Meanwhile, the movement of three-wheelers and rented microbuses remained normal in the district.

People were seen renting the vehicles to go to their destinations, paying a higher fare.

US Senate control still a toss-up Republicans inch toward House majority

REUTERS, Phoenix

Control of the US Senate hung in the balance yesterday as election workers in Arizona and Nevada tallied hundreds of thousands of uncounted ballots, a process officials in the two battleground states warn could drag on for days.

Either Democrats or Republicans can capture a Senate majority by sweeping contests in both states. A split would transform a December 6 runoff Senate election in Georgia into a proxy battle for the chamber, which

holds sway over President Joe Biden's judicial appointments.

In the fight for the House of Representatives, Republicans were inching closer to wresting control of the chamber from Biden's Democrats. House control would give Republicans veto power over Biden's legislative agenda and allow them to launch potentially damaging investigations into his administration.

Republicans had secured at least 211 of the 218 House seats they need for a majority following Tuesday's midterm vote, Edison Research

projected late on Thursday, while Democrats had won 197. That left 27 races yet to be determined, including several close contests.

The Republican House leader, Kevin McCarthy, has already announced his intention to run for speaker if Republicans take over, an outcome he has described as inevitable.

Biden told reporters on Thursday he and McCarthy had spoken but said he had not abandoned hope that Democrats could prevail in the House, despite the tough odds.