

Amazon workers call worldwide Black Friday strike

REUTERS, Berlin

Workers at Amazon AMZN.O sites across the globe, including in the United States, Germany and France, were expected to go on strike on Black Friday, targeting the online retailer on one of the busiest shopping days of the year with calls for better pay.

A global call for strike action came from the Make Amazon Pay initiative, which listed industrial action planned in over 30 countries across the globe.

In Germany, there were demonstrations at nine out of Amazon's 20 warehouses in the country, although yesterday morning, the company said the vast majority of its employees in Germany were working as normal.

France's SUD and CGT unions called for strike action in the country's eight warehouses.



Amazon France said there had been no sign of disruption to operations so far. Two French union officials said they were not expecting a big turnout because the rising cost of living was driving employees to seek overtime.

The Verdi union, which called the strikes in Germany, demanded the company recognise collective bargaining agreements for the retail and mail order trade sector and called for a further collective agreement on good working conditions.

French unions called for a higher cash bonus for the period preceding Christmas, during which employees at warehouses are asked to do a lot of overtime work.

"As an employer, Amazon offers great pay, benefits and development opportunities - all in an attractive and safe working environment," a spokesperson for Amazon in Germany said in a statement.

Among other things, the spokesperson pointed to a wage increase for Amazon logistics employees in Germany from September, with the starting wage now at 13 euros (\$13.52) per hour or more, including bonus payments.

The average wage after two years of work is more than 35,000 euros gross per year, Amazon Germany said, adding that they include extras such as subsidies for public transport and company pension plans.

Bangladesh has learnt a lot from Sri Lanka's woes

Says Lankan foreign minister in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star

PORIMOL PALMA

Sri Lanka is generally known for its quality education, healthcare, natural beauty and even migration policies and practices. But in recent times, the island nation has made the headlines for all the wrong reasons.

During his visit to Dhaka on November 23, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabri shared his views on the factors behind the financial crisis and if Bangladesh can learn anything from it in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Porimol Palma.

TDS: What were the fundamental weaknesses that led to this crisis?

Sabri: There are three reasons: bad fiscal management, bad luck and bad fiscal policies. The 2018 Easter Sunday attack really hit our tourism industry and shook our confidence. Then came the Covid-19 and Russia-Ukraine crisis. We were too dependent on tourism, which is seasonal and very risky. Some of the investments did not generate enough revenue. Then, we have an oversized public service with 1.5 million Sri Lankans. Some of our state-owned enterprises are actually bleeding. Until recently, we did not have a mechanism to price fuel on costing - we subsidised it. When you subsidise fuel, electricity and water, it has a cost. That is exactly what we are paying now.

Besides these, after the 2019 elections, we reduced taxes. Our tax revenue, which was 14 percent of GDP, came down to 8.3 percent. No country can survive with this level of tax revenue unless you have a huge export market or natural resources like the Middle East. If you look at the UK, their tax revenue is 33 percent of GDP. So, that was a mistake on our part. Then, overnight, without a comprehensive plan, we went for

organic fertiliser. That made a huge impact on our agriculture sector, which employs 33 percent of our population. Also, we went to the IMF for an emergency loan quite late.

TDS: There are some expensive projects, including China-



supported Hambantota Port. Aren't those mega projects responsible?

Sabri: Not everything. Some of the things could have been put in for more productive purposes. But, if you look at our highways, they are generating a lot of money. It has made Sri Lanka competitive. However, we were too complacent post-LTTE conflict.

TDS: What can Bangladesh learn from the Sri Lankan experience?

Sabri: Bangladesh has already learnt a lot. You went to the IMF for a loan long before. Now it is easy for Bangladesh to negotiate as its loans are not yet unsustainable. For us, it has become a very cumbersome process because we had to get debt assurances from various of our

creditors. In our case, there were popular decisions that did not sustain over the long term.

TDS: What is the economic situation in Sri Lanka now?

Sabri: If you look six months back, we had six to eight hours of power cuts. That has now come down to one to two hours. We had three to four days of fuel queues, which have been eliminated by introducing a QR code system. People are no more on the streets for cooking oil. Tourists started to come and so many ships and airlines are lining up to come to Sri Lanka. Investors have also started to come. But, we have a long way to go.

TDS: How do you describe the Bangladesh-Sri Lanka relationship? And, the prospects of cooperation?

Sabri: Bangladesh is a close friend of Sri Lanka for a long time, cooperating in socioeconomic areas. We have commonalities in our foreign policies: friendship to all and malice to none and members of the Non-Aligned Movement. Sixty percent of your ships go through our port. There is a lot of potential in terms of tourism, investment, and maritime and air connectivity. Sri Lankan firms are the third biggest investor here with close to \$3 billion worth of investment. Bangladesh proposed starting a cruise ship between Chittagong to Male and Colombo, which has a lot of potentials. Two private airlines will start flights. All these will hugely improve our connectivity.

TDS: The Indian Ocean is becoming a region of great power competition. How can the two countries work together for maritime cooperation?

Sabri: While we understand the concerns of neighbours and competitors, we think small and medium economies like

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University student killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A student of Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University (MBSTU) in Tangail was killed in a collision between two motorcycles on Thursday.



Nurul Absar Jewel, 22, was a third-year student in the textile engineering department. His bike collided head-on with another in the Sabalia area as he was entering the campus at around 9:00pm, leaving him seriously injured.

Pedestrians rushed him to the Tangail General Hospital where the on-duty doctors declared him dead, said Shamsul Alam Shiblee, the public relations officer of MBSTU.

Elderly woman dies after being hit by bus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bus hit a woman who was carrying her grandchild at ECB Chattar in Dhaka's cantonment area yesterday.

The deceased, Kulsum Begum, 65, was crossing the street with her three-year-old grandchild who was left injured in the incident, said Kazi Shahhan Haque, officer-in-charge of Cantonment Police Station.

The child is being treated at Kurmitola General Hospital.

The driver and the bus were seized by locals, the OC said.

Indian man arrested for trespassing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Police arrested an Indian man for trespassing into Bangladesh through the Barajala border in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj.

Arun Sarkar, 31, of Bijaynagar upazila in India's West Tripura, crossed the border to meet with local drug dealers, said police.

A case was filed against him and he will soon be produced in court, confirmed Madhabpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Muhammad Abdur Razzak.

He said Arun, who often trespassed into Bangladesh, also did the same on Thursday when he was caught by locals.

Informed, a team from the Kashinagar police outpost arrested him, he added.

High officials linked to question leak

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paper to hand over to two department drivers in exchange of Tk 4 lakh - half of it to be handed over to Major Taiz.

A Biman probe also points the finger at Major Taiz for the leak, although it did not investigate the Biman MD. The committee did not even question the MD, the very man it was reportable to.

The Daily Star has seen a copy of the report, submitted to the civil aviation ministry recently.

RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE RIGHT TIME?

But how Taiz came to be in the question paper preparation committee was seemingly executed over eight months.

A gazette notification dated March 2, 2020 from the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism shows Taiz was brought from the core of the artillery department of Bangladesh Army to Biman Bangladesh as a DGM (security). He joined the office the next day.

Two months before the question paper leak, on July 7, 2022, he was given the post of general manager of ground service equipment department of Biman, as additional duties.

To put him in this chair, SKM Reza, the then general manager of the department, was made an "attachment director" of the administration department.

An officer described what this post is.

"You have no room, no table, no chair, no office. You have to report to the office every morning, sign in using the biometric device, and then spend the rest of the work day sitting on chairs in the visiting room."

After 35 years of service, Reza was given this humiliating post, just before he was due to go into retirement.

Replacing him was Taiz, who had joined Biman just two years back.

On October 16, 2022, three months after he assumed the extra duties as general manager of ground service equipment department, Taiz was co-opted in the question paper preparation committee.

According to the office order, the committee was formed on March 10, 2020, composed of the director of administration, the principal of Bangladesh Airlines Training Centre (BATC) and the general manager of administration.

The order said the committee will be able to co-opt any officials of Biman and external experts.

THE DENIALS

Just four days before the exam, two people were co-opted - Major Taiz and the chief engineer of engineering and production.

Documents show that the recruitment and staffing department authorities held a meeting on October 13, 2022, deciding to co-opt Taiz, and the order was meted out on October 16, 2022.

The question paper was to be submitted to the committee in two days, on October 18, and at least for the exam for the junior operator (GSE), the just-included Taiz was to craft and submit as many as 50 questions, sources confirmed.

Four days later, he would be accused of leaking the question paper by two motor transport officers.

Taiz rejected the allegations.

"I have read the confessional statements of Masud and Jahangir. What they said about me is untrue," he said.

Asked about his driver, he said Masud, who had been his driver for a year, admitted to the guilt in his confession.

"I heard him taking calls while in the car about external engagements, but I did not profess any interest in it. I think they named me because the managing director likes me, and I come from the Army and maybe they thought they would be able to get some advantage," he said.

Biman Managing Director Md Zahid Hossain said Reza was removed because he was sick. "He used to be sick and could not work, so we put Taiz in his place," he said.

Another series of seemingly dubious transfers took place to make Nazmul Huda the principal of BATC.

Since April 13, 2019, Shahnur Ahmed had been the General Manager of Management Development Faculty of BATC.

Other than her, there was only one more general manager (in customer service) in the organisation, and hence it was known that seniority-wise Shahnur was next in line to be the principal, according to sources. She had spent two-thirds of her career as an instructor.

On September 14, 2022, Shahnur was sent to Biman's Printing and Publications department. This department is internally known as a place where people are sent for punishment.

On September 27, 2022, thirteen days after Shahnur's transfer, Nazmul Huda was promoted directly to the post of principal from a deputy general manager of the Training Department.

Nazmul denied any foul play, and

said the management decided this, not him.

"I did not ask for this position, the management made the choice," he said.

He declined to comment on the question paper leak.

Then there is Biman's managing director himself. In addition to being the MD and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), he was the director of marketing and sales as well as director of administration and human resources.

Personnel transfer records show that despite the fact that the ministry had sent an officer of similar level to Biman to take up one of these empty posts being held by the MD as additional responsibility, the officer was not allowed to begin office until the question paper leak blew up.

Zahid was director of administration and human resources when he was promoted to MD and CEO on July 13, 2022 - but he still held the post of the director of admin and HR since a replacement was not sent on deputation by the ministry yet.

The director of administration and human resource is the chair of the question paper preparation committee.

'CRIMINAL OFFENCE'

On August 21, 2022, a joint secretary named Kamrul Hasan was sent on deputation by the public administration ministry to join Biman as a director. He reported to the ministry of civil aviation and tourism on September 12, 2022 as being available to join the flag carrier's organisation.

Biman recruited the director only on November 9, 2022, after the question paper leak had been uncovered and law enforcers had arrested the main suspects.

Even though Kamrul had been available for work at least one and a half months prior to the recruitment exam, Zahid Hossain had not vacated the chair of director of admin, a post that leads the question paper preparation committee.

When Kamrul was brought in, the director of customer service was made the director of administration and HR, and Kamrul was placed in the empty seat of the director of customer service.

The Biman MD denied being involved with the question paper leak.

Regarding Kamrul, he said, "After Kamrul's appointment by the ministry, I had to wait for a board meeting for the board to say yes, before I could appoint him. His matter was raised in the next board meeting after the ministry sent him," he said.

Biman Board Chairman Sajjadul Hasan, a former senior secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, said appointments and transfers are done by Biman's management, and not by the board.

"They simply let the board know. If someone is joining Biman, they will report to the MD," he said.

Asked if the joining date is decided by the MD, he replied in affirmative. He also said that there had been more than one board meeting between August and October.

According to an administrative order dated April 26, 2022, signed by the Biman MD himself, the recruitment committee was to have a ministry official on it. But there are no official records - internal documents, attendance sheets or minute records from any of the committee's meetings - that this committee took in any ministry official.

State Minister for civil aviation M Mahbub Ali said apart from law enforcement agencies, an internal investigation is going on and stern actions will be taken against those involved in the question paper leak.

"Leaking a question paper for recruitment is a crime. We won't spare anyone involved in the crime," he said.

BNP faces

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mayor Monirul Haque Sakku has been in discussions in political circles. Sakku was expelled from the BNP because he participated in the mayoral election in July, defying the party decision. BNP sources said Sakku wants to return to the party.

Regarding the rally, Sakku said, "We have arranged food and accommodation for 25,000 people."

On the other hand, Yeasin said he arranged food and accommodation for 30,000 people.

Hordes of BNP leaders and activists reached Cumilla city from Chandpur, Brahmanbaria and 17 upazilas of Cumilla. BNP Vice-Chairman Barkat Ullah Bulu and other leaders reached the city on Wednesday night.

"It will be the biggest rally in Cumilla in the recent history," he said. BNP's posters, banners and billboards were seen in different places of the city.

The party has been holding rallies in protest of the price hike of essentials, gas, electricity, and fuel.

Rallies have already been held in Mymensingh, Khulna, Rangpur, Barishal, Faridpur and Sylhet.

The party will hold a rally in Dhaka on December 10, concluding its series of rallies.

Another dream coming true

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The Karnaphuli divides Chattogram into two parts. The tunnel being built following the "one city two towns" model like Shanghai in China will connect the port city on the north end with Anwara upazila on the south.

It will be used as an alternative route to Cox's Bazar, Teknaf and Matarbari and northern Chattogram, and it will play an important role in improving the Asian Highway Network, strengthening connectivity between Bangladesh and neighbouring countries.

The tunnel is being constructed at a depth of 18 to 31 metres under the Karnaphuli and the length of the main tunnel is 3.32km. The length of each of the two tubes, having four lanes, is 2.45km. There will be a 5.35km connecting road at the western and eastern ends of the main tunnel and a 727m flyover at the Anwara end.

China Communication Construction Company Ltd is constructing the tunnel with more than 800 workers deployed.

According to the monthly progress report of the project in October, civil engineering works of the project are almost at the final stage. Electrical and mechanical works, including installation of lamps, fireproof plates, decorative plates, pumps, power supply and ventilation system, are now going on in full swing.

In November 2015, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved the multi-lane road tunnel project at a cost of Tk 8,446.64 crore and the project duration was set for December 2021.

The cost was later increased to Tk 10,374.42 crore and the project period extended to December 2022.

In the latest revision, the project duration has been extended till December 30, 2023, and the cost was increased by Tk 164 crore.

Sent to the Planning Commission earlier this month, this revision has already been passed by its Project Appraisal Committee and is awaiting approval at the next Ecne meeting by the beginning of next month.

At the beginning of the project, security and traffic management were not included in the project. Now these issues have been incorporated and that's why the duration and cost of the project were revised, said the director of the project, Harunur Rashid Chowdhury.

"The road work of the project

has also been completed for vehicle movement. Now the most important part of the tunnel, electro-mechanical work, is going on. It will take till January to complete this ongoing work."

He added, "The work related to the traffic system outside the tunnel will be completed by the end of December of 2023."

Md Khalilur Rahman, president of the Chattogram Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce & Industry (CMCCI), said after a few days, the Bay Terminal will be opened and it is located next to the tunnel road. Almost the same amount of goods as in Chittagong Port can be loaded and unloaded there.

"Millions of people will use this tunnel when the Mirsarai Economic Zone will be fully operational. Along with this, thousands of industrial factories in the north side of the tunnel will draw more investment."

The ongoing mega projects in Chattogram, including Korean EPZ at Anwara, Chinese industrial zone, Matarbari power plant and Matarbari deep-sea port, will enjoy the full benefit of this tunnel, he added.

At least 10 large industrial groups and 150 businesspeople have bought land in advance to establish factories in various sectors - power, petroleum, apparel, shipbuilding, fish processing, steel, cement and oil refinery - on the south bank of the Karnaphuli, according to official data.

Mahbubul Alam, president of the Chattogram Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), said, "The tunnel will contribute greatly to the economy, communication and tourism sector. Especially this will be the roadmap to an advanced Bangladesh in international trade."

He added, "Extensive commercial activities are going on in the area around the tunnel, including setting up new industrial factories and opening new branches of commercial banks."

According to the survey conducted in 2013 before the construction of the tunnel, 6.3 million vehicles will be able to move through the tunnel annually. According to that, about 17260 vehicles can run in a day.

By 2025, an average of 28,305 vehicles will travel through the tunnel every day. An average of 37,946 vehicles per day by 2030 and 162,000 vehicles have been estimated by 2067.