

DIALYSIS FEE HIKE
5 hurt as cops
charge baton
on protesters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least five people were injured as police charged with batons to disperse a demonstration in Chattogram city yesterday.

Some kidney dialysis patients, their relatives and others gathered on KB Fazlul Quader Road, near Chattogram Medical College Hospital, to protest the recent hike in dialysis prices at the medical facility.

For the second time in a week, after Sunday, they protested yesterday demanding restoration of the previous fees for the treatment.

"The protesters occupied the road for around three hours from 11:00am, completely halting vehicular movement," said Nurul Alam Ashik, in charge of CMCH Police Camp.

As police requested them to clear the road, some outsiders who intruded into the protest started hurling bricks at the law enforcers, forcing them to charge with baton around 2:00pm, he added.

Contacted, CMCH Director Brig Gen Shamim Ahsan said he knew nothing about the demonstration. "I am looking into it," he said.

According to sources, the haemodialysis centre at CMCH has been running under the management of Sandor Medicaids, on the basis of a public-private partnership (PPP) agreement, since 2017.

As per the agreement, the company set up 31 machines where poor patients, recommended by the CMCH authorities, would receive dialysis at a cost of Tk 486 per session, and the government would give Tk 2,180 subsidy per patient for each session.

The protesters, however, said a kidney patient needs dialysis eight times a month, and they had to pay Tk 2,795 the first two times and Tk 510 for each of the rest.

The hospital authorities recently raised the fee further.

Patients now have to pay Tk 2,935 for the first four sessions and Tk 535 for each of the rest sessions in a month, sources said.

Brig Gen Ahsan, on Sunday, said the hospital has a capacity of treating 6,500 kidney dialysis patients which is less than the demand.

Due to some limitations and as per the directives of the health ministry, the authorities had to raise the dialysis fees, he added.



Ukrainian members of the military fire an anti-aircraft weapon, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in the frontline city of Bakhmut, Ukraine yesterday. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Treasury running dry
Says bankrupt Sri Lanka, announces sharp govt spending cuts

AFP, Colombo

Bankrupt Sri Lanka yesterday announced sharp government spending cuts and warned it had barely enough revenue to pay public salaries and pensions despite huge tax hikes.

The island nation has defaulted on its \$46 billion public debt and is negotiating an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout after an unprecedented economic crisis last year brought widespread misery.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe ordered a five percent reduction in state spending this week and his administration warned yesterday that welfare payments for 1.8 million families below the poverty line could be delayed this month.

"The president informed the cabinet yesterday that the economic crisis this year is going to be worse than what we expected," government spokesman Bandula Gunawardana told reporters.

Gunawardana said the government

expected the economy to contract further this year after shrinking an estimated 8.7 percent in 2022.

"We will not get the projected tax revenue because this year too the economy will shrink," he said.

Sri Lanka needs to achieve debt sustainability as a precondition to secure a \$2.9 billion IMF loan.

The lender has also asked Colombo to trim its 1.5 million-strong public service, sharply raise taxes and sell off loss-making state enterprises.

Key creditors such as China and India are yet to agree upon a "haircut" on their loans to the South Asian nation, which has stalled Sri Lanka's efforts to restructure its debt.

Doubled personal income and corporate taxes kicked in on New Year's Day to shore up state revenue.

Electricity prices are also rising another 65 percent after a 75 percent tariff increase in August.

Sri Lanka's 22 million people endured months of food and fuel shortages, chronic blackouts and runaway inflation last year, inflaming public anger.

Wickremesinghe came to power in July at the peak of the crisis after his predecessor fled the country when protesters stormed his residence.

Sri Lanka will restart negotiations on trade pacts with India, China and Thailand after a four-month hiatus, an official said last week.

Officials from Thailand are scheduled to arrive in Sri Lanka this week to start the third round of talks after negotiations were suspended in 2018, said K J Weerasinghe, Sri Lanka's Chief Negotiator of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

Negotiations with India and China, Sri Lanka's biggest trading partners accounting for about \$5 billion each in bilateral trade in 2021, are expected to begin in February and March.

Recovery lengthy

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based on specific information.

Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) has been collecting information about smugglers from its counterparts in different countries, Mustafa said.

The BFIU provides the information to the Anti Corruption Commission, CID, and the National Board of Revenue, he said.

The ACC is currently investigating several cases filed over money laundering and individuals buying flats or homes in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia, the UK, the USA, Canada and some other countries.

Besides, proceedings of several cases filed by the CID are ongoing, he said.

Not so easy

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the people and their welfare. Don't think it will fall down so easily," she said.

HOMECOMING DAY OBSERVED

The nation yesterday observed the historic Homecoming Day in a befitting manner.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages on the eve of the day.

In the morning, Hasina paid homage to Bangabandhu by placing a wreath at the portrait of the Father of the Nation in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at the capital's Dhamondi, reports BSS.

Flanked by ministers and AI central leaders, she also placed another wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu.

Bangabandhu, the undisputed leader of the nation and supreme commander of the country's Liberation War, returned to independent Bangladesh via London and New Delhi on January 10, 1972, after 290 days of confinement in a Pakistan jail.

Since then, the nation is observing the day as the Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Marking the day, the ruling Awami League also took up various programmes.

The day was also observed in Bangladesh missions across the world.

Bushra walks out

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Fardin, a third year student of civil engineering at Buet, was found dead in Shitalakkhya in Narayanganj on November 7, three days after he went missing.

After investigating the incident for over a month, the Detective Branch of police and Rab on December 14 said Fardin died by suicide after jumping off a bridge into the river.

A day later, DB Chief Mohammad Harun Or Rashid said they did not find Bushra's involvement in the incident.

WB forecasts 5.2pc GDP growth

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made it harder to purchase luxury goods, among other measures to preserve international reserves."

Rising energy costs and supply constraints saw industrial production contract in September from its peak in March, it said, adding that the rising cost of imports almost doubled the trade deficit since 2019.

The deficit would have been larger were it not for the robust demand for Bangladesh's garment and its growing share in the global market.

Since early June, the Bangladeshi taka has depreciated by 18 percent and foreign exchange reserves have declined by \$8 billion, pushing inflation to 8.7 percent (year-on-year) in December, it said.

The heady cocktail of rising inflation and its negative impact on household incomes and firms' input costs, as well as energy shortages, import restrictions and monetary policy tightening means growth is expected to slow to 5.2 percent in fiscal 2022-23, down from 6.5 percent forecasted earlier in June last year.

"This is down from 7.2 percent growth in the previous year, but is expected to pick up again and return towards its potential pace in fiscal 2023-24," it added.

The forecast though has been dismissed by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal.

In a meeting with the new WB country director Abdoulaye Seck yesterday, hours before the lender unveiled the report, Kamal was informed of the lower growth forecast for this fiscal year, The Daily Star has learnt from people familiar with the discussion.

"It will never ever be less than 6 percent," Kamal told Seck, said people quoting the finance minister.

Bhutan will grow at 4.1 percent and Nepal at 5.1 percent.

The economies of the South Asia

Last month, the government revised down the growth forecast from 7.2 percent to 6.5 percent due to the impacts of the Ukraine war, bringing it in line with the projection made by the Asian Development Bank (6.6 percent) in September last year and International Monetary Fund (6 percent) the following month.

"5.2 percent is not bad growth if you assess the global situation," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the WB's Dhaka office.

But the downgrade from the previous fiscal year is marked.

"It is because of four crucial developments in the economy over the past six months," he said.

The factors are the dollar shortage, which has unleashed a host of problems, inflation that has eaten away people's purchasing power and caused a decline in the real wage, global inflation that has made imports prohibitive, and supply-side problems in the form of energy crisis.

Bangladesh is not the only economy in South Asia to see a downward revision in growth forecast this time.

Growth in India is projected to slow to 6.9 percent in its fiscal 2022-23, a 0.6 percentage point downward revision since June, as the global economy and rising uncertainty will weigh on export and investment growth. India is expected to be the world's fastest growing major economy.

Pakistan is forecast to grow at 2 percent in fiscal 2022-23, half the pace that was anticipated last June, and faces challenging economic conditions, including the repercussions of the recent flooding and continued policy and political uncertainty.

Bhutan will grow at 4.1 percent and Nepal at 5.1 percent.

The economies of the South Asia

region continue to be adversely affected by shocks emanating from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including higher food and energy prices, and by the tightening of global financial conditions as central banks in the region and elsewhere act to fight high inflation, the WB said.

Subsequently, growth in the region is projected to slow to 5.5 percent in 2023, from 6.1 percent the previous year, on slowing external demand and tightening financial conditions, before picking up slightly to 5.8 percent in 2024.

Growth is revised lower over the forecast horizon and is below the region's 2000-19 average growth of 6.5 percent. This pace reflects still robust growth in India, Maldives, and Nepal, offsetting the effects of the floods in Pakistan and the economic and political crises in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

The global economy is projected to grow by 1.7 percent in 2023 and 2.7 percent in 2024.

The sharp downturn in growth in the face of elevated inflation, higher interest rates, reduced investment, and disruptions caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine is expected to be widespread, with forecasts in 2023 revised down for 95 percent of advanced economies and nearly 70 percent of emerging market and developing economies.

"Given fragile economic conditions, any new adverse development -- such as higher than expected inflation, abrupt rises in interest rates to contain it, a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, or escalating geopolitical tensions -- could push the global economy into recession. This would mark the first time in more than 80 years that two global recessions have occurred within the same decade."

Toru Group Ltd was approved. The following October, NTMC officials, including Major Gen Ahsan, went to Greece with Toru Group to be trained on the vehicle's use.

Haaretz alleged that Toru, whose CEO is Israeli citizen Assaf Elias, was an intermediary between Bangladesh and Passitora.

The report also stated that another Israel-based company Prelysis Communications and Information sold wi-fi interception system to another intelligence agency in Bangladesh.

Haaretz cited an order issued by the Prime Minister's Office in March 2019, stating that the top officials of the agency were to go to Cyprus to conduct a pre-shipment inspection.

Export records from Cyprus show that company exported a Wagtail WiFi Interception System worth \$2.9 million in July 2019.

AL to stay alert

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Sources said police warned legal action if both sides were blocked by the BNP.

The warning was made when a delegation, led by BNP Vice-Chairman AZM Zahid Hossain, met the DMP commissioner at the DMP headquarters last night.

Police will remain on high alert and a huge number of cops will be deployed across the capital to avoid unwanted situations.

Meanwhile, Dhaka North AL will hold a rally at the Eidgah Maidan in Mirpur around 2:30pm, and Dhaka South AL will hold one in front of the AL headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue around 11:00am.

Obaidul Quader, AL general secretary, will be present in both the rallies.

"Our leaders and activists will take to the streets from the morning and will be on alert. We will not create any obstacle for the BNP's programme. We will resist only if they try to create chaos," Sheikh Bazlur Rahman, president of Dhaka North AL, told the

BNP, allies aim for a show

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The divisional rallies that started in October and ended in December last year proved that the BNP is organised and united, he added.

The movement will move forward in phases and all the opposition forces will be on a single platform, said other leaders.

Except Jamaat, none of BNP's like-minded parties have the strength to show their strength on the streets. However, the BNP is making them a part of the simultaneous movement as a strategy to keep the ruling party cornered.

"The people of the country and also the international community will know that all the opposition forces

Handcuffed body of a man found

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Police yesterday recovered an unidentified handcuffed body in Natore's Baraigram upazila.

The body of the unidentified male, around 30 years old, was found by locals in a wheat field in Majhgaon Boabil around 11:00am. Ropes were tied around his neck and feet, said Abu Siddique, officer-in-charge of Baraigram Police Station.

"The victim might have been strangled to death. The handcuff found on the body is not used by law enforcement agencies. It might have been made locally," said Sharif Al Razib, additional superintendent of police (Baraigram circle).

The CID, PBI, and district police teams have collected evidence from the spot, while police are trying to identify the deceased, he added.

Form bodies to stop sexual harassment in schools

HC orders again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed forming of committees for preventing sexual harassment at educational institutions across the country.

The education ministry and University Grants Commission have been asked to implement this in compliance with a 2009 HC verdict.

The HC delivered the order after holding a hearing on a writ petition of the rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra.

Following the same petition, the HC on January 9 last year issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain why their inaction and failure to implement the 2009 verdict should not be declared illegal.

2 sued over rape in Noakhali

STAR REPORT