

## 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 Ashek, in-charge of CMCH Police Camp.

As police requested them to clear the road, some outsiders who intruded into the protest started hurling brickbats 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 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.

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.

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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-year 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.

## 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 Boalbil 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

Two men were sued yesterday over the rape of a teenage girl in Noakhali’s Begumganj.

Zunayed, 24, and Emon, 23, of the upazila, raped the victim at gunpoint, read the case statement.

On information, the victim’s neighbour Mizanur Rahman, also a member of the local village police, filed a case with Begumganj Police Station.

According to the case statement, Zunayed raped the girl at gunpoint on January 5 and 6 at her home. She was staying alone.

On January 10, Emon raped her again at gunpoint, the case statement added.

Contacted, Mir Zahidul Haque Rony, officer-in-charge of Begumganj Police Station, said the accused were on the run and that the law enforcers were trying to arrest them.

The victim was sent to a hospital for medical tests, he added.

## 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 Dhanmondi, reports BSS.

Flanked by ministers and AL 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.

## Haaretz reports Dhaka bought spy tech

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technological unit.”

Haaretz reports that the system consists of a van equipped with surveillance equipment and tracking software, which breaks into mobile phones using the cellphone network or Wi-Fi network for data “including encrypted WhatsApp messages, Facebook chats, contact lists, calls and text messages within a radius of about half a kilometer.”

The report said the system can be used to inject spyware into computers and mobile phones within its range.

The newspaper reported that the van was bought for \$5.7 million.

The 2021-22 procurement plan document of the NTMC shows that it was to buy a “Vehicle Mounted Data Interceptor 2”, among other equipment, for Tk 191 crore.

According to the document, the procurement was to be completed by

April 30, 2022.

The NTMC is under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In addition, Tk 26 crore was kept aside for the maintenance of the said device among others during fiscal year 2021-22. Another Tk 30 crore was kept for its maintenance in fiscal year 2022-23.

NTMC’s Director General Maj Gen Ziaul Ahsan was contacted over the phone, but he declined to comment on the matter.

The NTMC had first approached the cabinet committee on purchases for permission to directly buy the device in May 2019, according to media reports following a meeting in May 2019. Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal presided over that meeting.

At a cabinet committee meeting on economic affairs on June 9, 2021, the purchase of the surveillance device for Tk 65.56 crore from Swiss company

City

## 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

## HC summons 21 B’baria lawyers

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Al Jalil on January 17 to give explanations about their conducts.

The bench also issued a rule asking Tanvir, Akkas and Zubayer to show causes as to why contempt of court proceedings should not be initiated against them for their misconducts with the judge and creating chaos in the courtroom.

Deputy Attorney General Tushar Kanti Roy told The Daily Star that a section of lawyers, led by Tanvir, Akkas and Zubayer, went to the court of Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Tribunal-1 of Brahmanbaria on January 2 for moving a case.

Daily Star.

Dhaka South AL President Abu Ahmed Mannafi told this correspondent that party activists will be on the roads and remain vigilant.

“The BNP cannot be trusted. It can do anything and thus, we asked our activists to remain alert without creating any obstacles.”

Meanwhile, Chhatra League, the pro-AL student body, announced its own counter sit-in at the capital’s Shahbagh intersection from 11:00am to 3:00pm.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, at a programme in the city yesterday, warned that any public sufferings or acts of anarchy centring the BNP’s sit-in will not be tolerated.

He, however, said the opposition party will not face any obstruction and will be allowed to hold a peaceful protest.

“Law enforcers will only take action if they [the BNP] block roads, or carry out vandalism or other destructive activities in the name of a mass sit-in,” he said.

were on a single platform. That’s why the simultaneous movement is important for the BNP,” said a leader, requesting anonymity.

The party leaders held a series of meetings and assigned several senior leaders to make today’s sit-in a success.

In the capital, the programme will be held in front of BNP’s Nayapaltan headquarters from 10:00am to 2:00pm. The party’s next course of action will be announced at the event.

The BNP has been demonstrating to press home its 10 demands that include resignation of the government and election under a non-partisan interim government.

The lawyers requested the judge of the tribunal, Mohammad Faruque, to hold a hearing on the case, but the judge refused to hear the matter as his court hours ended at that time.

Protesting the judge’s refusal, the lawyers created chaos in the courtroom and scolded Mohammad Faruk, a district and sessions judge, and the court officials, prompting the judge to send a letter to the Supreme Court registrar general seeking a necessary decision to this effect, DAG Tushar said.

He also said the documents including video footage of the incident have been sent to the SC registrar general’s office.