



"We demand today officially ... that Israel respects these resolutions or suspend Israel's membership of the UN."

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas



B4 Denim expo kicks off in Dhaka



P11 Etihad awaits epic clash



P7 Ukraine repels Russian attacks



P3 Danger of dengue outbreak looms large

DHAKA-COX'S BAZAR RAIL LINK Opening this Sept but bottlenecks to stay till 2028

Rickety Kalurghat bridge, poor state of Ctg to Dohazari line to trouble travellers

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The Dhaka-Cox's Bazar rail line via Chattogram is likely to open this September, but the rail connectivity between the capital and the tourist district may not be smooth before 2028.

Officials said the dilapidated Kalurghat bridge and the poor state of a 52km section from Chattogram city to Dohazari are the problems.

Bangladesh Railway is to take up two projects -- one for building a new bridge at Kalurghat, and the other for improving the Chattogram-Dohazari section. But projects would not be completed before 2028, BR sources said.

Currently, the bridge, with a speed limit of just 10kmph, is off-limits for heavy locomotives and trains.

Until the new bridge is built there, BR is planning to spend Tk 60 crore to repair the current one and make it sturdy enough for heavy locomotives. However, the repairs will not allow trains' speed limit on the bridge to be raised much.

The Chattogram-Dohazari section is a meter-gauge line with a speed limit of 48kmph, a stark contrast to the 100km rail line from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar's Ramu with a 100kmph speed limit.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman said, "There is a fault or weakness in the planning. And that's why the Dhaka-Cox's Bazar rail operation will not be smooth until the new bridge is built and the section [Chattogram-Dohazari] is improved."

Speed limits -- on the bridge and the section mentioned -- will hamper the effectiveness of operations on the line, said Hadiuzzaman, a professor of the civil engineering department at Buet.

Referring to the rail speed limit imposed on the Bangabandhu Bridge, he said, "We didn't learn any lesson from that experience."

The 20kmph speed limit on Bangabandhu Bridge has been causing delays in rail operations from Dhaka to northern and south-western parts of the country.

CHATTOGRAM-COX'S BAZAR RAIL LINE

The government took up the 128km metre-gauge rail line project in 2010, with a target to complete by June 2013. It was supposed to cost Tk 1,852.35 crore.

In 2014, the government decided to install dual-gauge lines and keep space for double lines, which raised the cost to a staggering Tk 18,034.47 crore.

The authorities then made more changes and shelved the plan to build the lines up to Ramu's Gundum, near the Myanmar border.

But the physical work of the 100km Dohazari-Ramu section started in March 2018, with a current deadline set for June 2024, with a one-year defect liability period.

Visiting the project site yesterday, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujjan

CHATTOGRAM-COX'S BAZAR RAIL LINE
Length: 100km
Cost: Tk 18,034.47 crore

UPCOMING TWO PROJECTS TO REMOVE BOTTLENECKS

BUILDING BIGGER RAIL-CUM ROAD KALURGHAT BRIDGE
Possible Cost: Tk 14,000 crore
Possible deadline: December 2028

EXPANDING LINE FROM CTG CITY TO DOHAZARI
Possible cost: Tk 7,073 crore
Possible Deadline: June 2027



A Rohingya woman washes clothes past destroyed houses at Basara refugee camp in Sittwe, Myanmar yesterday, a couple of days after Cyclone Mocha made landfall.

PHOTO: AFP

SALARY HIKE OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES Inflationary risks put govt in doubt about timing

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government is in a dilemma over the timing of increasing the salary of its employees as a risk of further rise in inflation is associated with it.

Finance ministry officials said they are undecided about whether the salary will be hiked from July this year or January next year.

The salary may be increased by 10 percent of the basic salary of an employee considering the current inflation rate. This will include an annual increment of 5 percent, they said.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the inflation rate was 8.64 percent in April, up from around 6 percent a year ago.

Any salary hike for government employees does have an impact on the prices of essentials as the prices go up further after the implementation of such a decision, officials said.

The government has already hiked electricity and gas prices several times which had a negative impact on the commodity prices. It has planned to increase the electricity price again by June.

If the salary is hiked from July, it will be difficult for the government to control inflation before the next national election. That is why

the government is considering to raise the salary from January next, officials told The Daily Star.

The next parliamentary election is scheduled to be held either in late December this year or early January next year.

On Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the government is considering increasing the salaries of its employees in line with the inflation.

She, however, said the government does not have any plan on granting dearness allowance to the employees.

On May 14, the National Board of Revenue held a meeting with the PM where the finance minister raised the issue of salary hike. The premier gave a green signal, said an official who was present at the meeting.

According to the Ministry of Public Administration, there are 15.55 lakh government employees and about 6.70 lakh government teachers.

If the salary of its employees is hiked by 5 percent, in addition to the 5 percent yearly increment, the government will have to spend an extra Tk 2,000 crore a year.

HOUSEHOLD USE Gas price may rise by up to Tk 512 a month

Titas without proper study says household gas use a lot higher than BERC estimate

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Without conducting a proper study, Titas has said the average household gas consumption is a lot more than the estimation made by the energy regulator last year.

If Titas estimation is taken into consideration, the price of domestic gas may rise by 47 percent for dual burner stoves and 39 percent for single burner ones because the assumed consumption is a major factor in deciding the tariff.

People now pay Tk 1,080 a month for using a dual burner stove and Tk 990 for a single burner one. If the proposal is approved, Titas' 28.5 lakh subscribers may have to pay Tk 1,592 and Tk 1,380 respectively.

Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company sent a letter early this month to Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission about refixing the assumed gas consumption by households.

The letter said households with non-metered gas

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



Int'l community not doing enough for Rohingyas

PM says in interview with BBC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

International communities are not doing as much as they should about the Rohingyas and their repatriation, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said in an interview with the BBC.

In the interview that took place during her visit to the UK earlier this month, she also talked about the US sanctions on the Rab, rights abuses and the upcoming election.

BBC Bangla service published a story on the interview on its website yesterday.

Queried why the US slapped sanctions on the Rab, the prime minister said, "The force on which they imposed sanctions

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



The Auchpara area in Tongi is littered with posters as the campaign for the Gazipur City Corporation election gains momentum ahead of the May 25 polls. Supporters of the mayor and councillor candidates are campaigning in the city to woo voters. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BNP expels 29 leaders for life

They're vying for councillor posts in Gazipur city polls defying party decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday expelled its 29 leaders for life for taking part in the Gazipur city polls going against the party decision.

The 29 are running for councillor posts.

The party issued a press release, signed by Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, in this regard. The release was issued after a virtual meeting between BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and the party's Gazipur city unit leaders, said party sources.

On May 12, the party issued show-cause notices to its 30 leaders and asked them to reply within 24 hours why actions would not be taken against them.

The release said the party is taking organisational actions against those who are participating in the Gazipur city polls, slated for May 25, ignoring its decision.

The leaders are running in the polls without giving satisfactory replies to the show-cause notices, it added.

So, the 29 leaders have been expelled for life in line with the party's charter.

The BNP earlier announced that it would boycott the mayoral polls to five city corporations and said it would go tough on party leaders and activists who would run for councillor. Actions would also be taken against their patrons, the party warned.