



Rejecting the Tk 12,500 minimum salary put forth by the wage board, several workers' associations bring out a procession near Jatiya Press Club yesterday. They demanded Tk 25,000 minimum wage for RMG workers. They also sought justice for workers shot dead recently as police used firearms to disperse protesters.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# HARTAL, BLOCKADE Transport workers struggling to survive

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MASHFIQ MIZAN

Rows of buses standing idle at terminals, images of torched vehicles and reports of transport workers being burnt alive inside vehicles – these are some of the events that have recently dominated the news, during the initial two phases of the BNP-Jamaat enforced blockade and hartal.

However, transport workers who are barely staying alive during these times rarely make the headlines.

In the last few days, this newspaper talked to transport workers and staffers at bus terminals, in an attempt to shed some light on the grim reality of their lives.

These workers depend on earnings per trip, rendering them financially destitute when buses remain off the roads.

During a visit to the Gabtoli terminal on Thursday morning, this newspaper observed Shariful Islam, the driver of SB Link bus operating on the Dhaka-Nagarpur (Tangail) route, sitting idly with his colleagues.

"When the wheels of buses don't move, the wheels of our fortune also remain deadlocked, meaning we don't earn a single penny."

"I have earned Tk 1,200 in the first week of November, thanks to two trips I made between last Friday night and Saturday morning, as there were no blockades on those dates," he said.

Even on the weekdays which saw no blockades, long distance buses refrained from operating due

to a passenger shortage, fueled by the persistent fear of arson attacks, he said.

"Despite long distance buses operating last weekend, the passenger turnout was notably low, with only 16-17 seats occupied out of our 40-seat buses," he explained.

"I cannot afford to have my family with me in Dhaka; I have two school going children. I usually send money to them in the first week of every month, but I am yet to send any money this month."

"The rent for my mess in Dhaka is also overdue, and I don't know what to do," he added.

Hafizur Rahman, 45, another bus driver, of Islam Paribahan in Dhaka Thakurgaon route, said his earning from the first week of November was Tk 1,500.

"I've witnessed various crises throughout my two decade-long career, including the pandemic and blockades and hartals in 2013-2014. However, I've never experienced such overwhelming difficulties before."

"We were already struggling to make ends meet due to the rising cost of essentials," he said.

Returning to the terminal yesterday afternoon, the correspondents talked to Rabiul Islam, a counterman at Souhardo Paribahan.

Hoping for a substantial passenger turnout on a typical Friday, he said, "Usually, the number of passengers increases on the second Friday of every month as people visit their villages after receiving salary."

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## US reiterates need for free, fair polls

DIPLOMATIC  
CORRESPONDENT

The US wants Bangladesh's elections to be free, fair and peaceful as it looks to continue deepening the partnership in trade, climate space, security, and other areas where potentials exist.

"We do not support a particular government or political party or candidate in any country, and that in areas where there are elections ongoing," said US State Department Spokesperson Vedant Patel during a press briefing on Thursday.

"Our goal and intent is for these elections to take place in a free and fair way that respects the will of the people of that country."

Patel was asked how he evaluates the current government that, with the support of the US, took a zero-tolerance policy in combating terrorism and radicalism, which also is the national interest of US.

In response, he said last year the US and Bangladesh celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations.

"...and of course that this is a country that we're looking to continue to deepen our relationships and partnerships with as there continue to be a number of areas, including trade, cooperation in the climate space, cooperation in the security space, and otherwise where that potential exists."

## Withdraw blockade on Kali Puja

Urges Oikya Parishad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad yesterday called upon all opposition party leaders, including those of BNP, to withdraw the blockade on the day of Kali Puja.

Kali Puja, one of the major religious festivals of the Hindu community, will be held on Sunday.

In a statement, Oikya Parishad's General Secretary Rana Dasgupta said, "We have urged all the opposition political parties to withdraw their blockade programme keeping in mind the issue of religious festival observance in a peaceful environment."

BNP on Thursday called a 48-hour countrywide blockade from Sunday demanding resignation of the government, election-time neutral government and release of its leaders.

# Dengue outbreak worsens outside Dhaka

HELEMUL ALAM

Though winter is knocking at the door, the dengue outbreak still continues to ravage the country, with most infections now being recorded outside Dhaka.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, in the last 24 hours, at least 11 dengue patients died. Of them eight were from outside Dhaka. Besides, 1,333 were hospitalised, including 1,035 from outside Dhaka.

The DGHS data also shows the total number of dengue cases this year till yesterday was 2,88,572, of which 1,85,683 were from outside Dhaka.

GM Saifur Rahman, an entomologist at the National University, said the absence of surveillance in the district towns has been a major reason behind the severe outbreak outside the capital.

"The government must have effective surveillance to identify dengue hotspots. This will enable local government departments, community organisations, and educational institutions to conduct targeted interventions," he said.

The initiatives that have already been taken or are going to be implemented in Dhaka are also needed to be pursued outside the capital, he suggested.

Creating a body to control mosquito population, breeding



**The government must have effective surveillance to identify dengue hotspots. This will enable local government departments, community organisations, and educational institutions to conduct targeted interventions.**

GM SAIFUR RAHMAN  
An entomologist at National University

and spread is badly needed to carry out activities outside Dhaka, alongside upgrading logistics, manpower, and necessary funds, Saifur also said.

"It was necessary to take proper steps at the beginning of the season. As the authorities concerned failed to do so, they will have to take prompt steps now," he said.

First case identification is most

important to control dengue outbreak. If it can be identified where the first case started, and necessary steps are taken to control Aedes mosquitoes, then it cannot spread, he said.

However, as the dengue outbreak has been going on for quite some time, first case identification is no longer possible. So, authorities will have to identify the last case and start from there, he also said.

Forming a dedicated body to locate those first and last cases and take necessary steps is very essential, he said.

Movement of people due to easy road communication is another reason for dengue spread this year, Saifur also said.

There is no way out without eradicating adult mosquitoes and larvae, he added.

Kabirul Bashar, an entomologist of Jahangirnagar University, said there is a mosquito management system in place in Dhaka, which is absent at the district levels.

He said all the local government bodies will need to be equipped to curb dengue outbreak, and the government will have to provide necessary funds to this end.

Raising awareness is also important as people outside Dhaka are not much aware about how dengue spreads, while mosquito control systems are also not developed, Bashar added.

## Election not an issue in Rohingya repatriation

Says Chinese envoy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen yesterday said the repatriation of the Rohingyas living in Bangladesh could start before the election.

"Election is not an issue. We are working together. Whenever the situation or condition is right, they [Rohingyas] may go back. It can take place before the election or after the election," Wen told journalists after visiting Cox's Bazar General Hospital.

Terming China a mediator in solving the Rohingya crisis, he said, "We are true friends to both Bangladesh and Myanmar. They trust us. At their request, we act as a facilitator. We bring them together for talks so that the Rohingya people can go back."

"We are quite happy that a lot of progress has been made. Myanmar officials came here, went and talked to some Rohingyas. They [Rohingyas] went to Rakhine to witness [the progress there]. I believe there is a consensus to send back some Rohingyas by a pilot project," he further said.

## 500 mistakes in river commission's book: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A recently published book of the National River Conservation Commission contains at least 500 instances of wrong information, claimed environmental and river protection activists at a seminar yesterday.

They demanded the immediate withdrawal of this book titled "Bangladesher Nad-nadir Songa and Sangkha". They also demanded re-listing the names of 60,000 river encroachers removed from the commission's website.

Speakers made this demand at a seminar organised by Nongar Bangladesh Trust, an organisation on river protection and environmental affairs, at Jatiya Press Club.

Mahbub Siddiqui, vice president of Bangladesh Nadi Bachao Andolon, said some mistakes made in the book are significant, such

as overlooking the fact that a part of the Padma in Bangladesh is also known as the Ganges. Additionally, the book incorrectly identifies Ichhamati as a long river with a length of 463 km whereas the largest river in the country is actually Karatoa, measuring 463 km.

Besides, 27 encroached water bodies were incorrectly referred to as rivers, he said.

Siddiqui highlighted a major discrepancy in the book's river count, stating that it mentions 1,008

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## Deal with BNP's attacks, prepare for elections

Quader tells AL joint meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the party has two tasks to deal with ahead of the elections.

"One of them is to prepare for the elections. And another is to maintain electoral atmosphere by dealing with BNP's clandestine attacks in the name of movement," said Quader while addressing a joint meeting at AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital.

Stating that an unfavourable situation is prevailing in the political arena, he said this meeting with leaders of Dhaka city north and south AL and affiliated organisations would help strengthen the party's activities.

"If the election is held in January's first week, we have very little time," said Quader.

He said BNP's movement on October 28 to remove Sheikh Hasina from power has failed.

"BNP's old habits of committing violence and arson have returned. They are making every effort to remove Sheikh Hasina from power," said the AL general secretary.

In response to a query, Quader claimed BNP and its allies are instigating garment factory workers' protests.

"Most of the demands of garment workers have been resolved. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is monitoring the matter," he said.

He urged the workers to return to work and not be misled by the provocation and rumours of BNP and its allies.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives donations from Bank Asia Chairman Romo Rouf Chowdhury (second from right) and its Director Zakia Rouf Chowdhury (far right) for the PM's Relief Fund at Gono Bhaban yesterday. Various financial organisations gave the donations to distribute blankets and warm clothes among cold-stricken people. Bangladesh Association of Banks Chairman Md Nazrul Islam Mazumder was also present on the occasion.

PHOTO: PID