

PROTESTING PRICE HIKE Ganatantra Mancha rally foiled in city Dozens hurt in cop action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday halted and charged truncheons on a procession of Gonotontro Moncho marching towards the Secretariat to protest rising commodity prices, "looting of banks", and money laundering.

Witnesses said when the protesters tried to break through a police barricade near the Zero Point around 1:00pm, a scuffle broke out. Police then charged truncheons, they said.

Gonotontro Moncho claimed that its 40 activists, including Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolan, were injured.

Seven of the injured took primary treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Bachchu Mia, in-charge of the DMCH police outpost.

Saki alleged that police charged truncheons on their activists without any provocation. When he tried to pacify the situation, police also beat him up.

ADC Shah Alam Mohammad Akhtarul Islam of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna zone) said Gonotontro Moncho took out the procession without permission. Police repeatedly asked them not to go to the Secretariat. But they did not listen to them, he said.

"Gonotontro Moncho told us that they would go in front of the Secretariat and leave peacefully. But they tried to enter the Secretariat by breaking through the barricade.

"It seemed that those who were pushing the barricade were trained. We think they were hired," he said.

Asked about any arrests, the police officer said, "We have detained one or two of those who tried to attack police with sticks. But it could not be confirmed how many people have been detained."

After holding a brief rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club around noon, Gonotontro Moncho took out the procession.

At the rally, Saki said, "A clique is desperate to keep this government in power. The government takes up mega projects for mega loot. Everyone is sharing this looted money.

"If we don't take to the streets, this government cannot be ousted. Don't look at the foreigners. They just take advantage. This government can only be removed and the voting rights restored through movement," he said.

Mahmudur Rahman Manna, president of Nagorik Oikya, said no matter what the government is saying, it will not be able to reduce prices of commodities during Ramadan. A country cannot run worse than the way Bangladesh is being run now, he added.



Why are biriyani pots covered in red cloth?

MH HAIDER

Whenever you visit or just walk past any roadside eatery, you often see large deghs or pots covered in a red cloth. You know that those pots hold biriyani, polau, or the like but do you know why all these deghs or dekchis are always wrapped in red?

Finding a satisfactory answer may be hard in this regard but after interviewing several people – culinary experts, restaurant owners, servers, chefs, and connoisseurs – what we present you here is a compilation of the most popular theories and opinions.

Shawkat Osman, author and researcher in the culinary field, stated that the cloth is the "laal shalu" we are



PHOTO: STAR



all familiar with. He added, "Red is an attractive colour. Also, this colour may show less dirt on the cloth."

The notion of the attractiveness of the red cloth is reverberated by almost every server and owner of various eateries in different locations of Dhaka. "Shundorjo" – "it is beautiful and attractive" – they all said, often adding, "It has always been this way."

"A red fabric lasts for around a month," one of the servers in an eatery near Farmgate informed. "We buy 'shalu kapor' from any market that sells fabrics. It is readily available."

The question remains, why cover it with a cloth in the first place? An obvious answer, as suggested by several servers in Old Dhaka, is that it is to

keep the flame alive that is blowing below the pot, saving it from the wind.

Hence, going back to our original question of why red is the colour of choice, a baburchi (chef), Md Shahid Hossain, opined, "It is the 'trademark' colour for biriyani. Also, people know from far away that there is food in the deg. But if the deg is not wrapped in cloth, it indicates that the deg is now empty."

Such interesting theories continued emerging. Comments started pouring in after posting the question on the Facebook page, The Food Talk, a platform for culinary enthusiasts.

Answers ranged from how the



attractive red is used to draw the attention of people; to indicating that the food is hot; to the notion that red may increase appetite and hence many food companies around the world use this colour in their branding.

Meanwhile, Syed Ahmed Ali, an Old Dhaka resident from the Saat Rowza area, sees it as a tradition springing

from the idea of "nazar" or the evil eye. He has seen that even when a small number of snacks were brought from one place to another, people traditionally used to carry them in a red handkerchief, to ward off any evil eye on the food, of any passerby.

Yet, another theory speaks of a Mughal connection, as pondered upon by several people, including Labib Tarafdar, one of the owners of Madchef, Cheez, and as well as Pagla Baburchi – with the latter offering biriyani, among other items.

"I cannot say for sure, but I have heard that during the Mughal era, food served to the royalty was done with some usage of red cloth. Perhaps, the practice we see today has an influence from there?" he mused.

It is widely believed that during Emperor Humayun's time, the custom in the imperial kitchen, of covering food/serving dishes/utensils with red cloth began. There are many versions of this story.

Stories and opinions are aplenty! It is hard to pick one theory over another, given the obscurity of the reason behind this ubiquitous custom.

Quite possibly, the real answer lies in the aggregate of a number of these theories. Also, we have to keep in mind that this practice is not just limited to Dhaka, but can be found in many parts of the subcontinent.

So, why do you think degs are covered in red cloth?

\$12.9b in remittances received in last 6 months: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister Abul Hasan Mahmud Ali yesterday told the parliament that, from July to January of the current financial year (2023-24), the country received some \$12.9 billion (\$12,900.63 million) in remittances.

The minister said this while responding to a question from Independent MP Muhammad Saiful Islam.

Of the amount, \$2,425.58 million came from the United Arab Emirates, \$1,610.38 million from the United Kingdom, \$1,601.22 million from Saudi Arabia, \$1,332.63 million from the United States, and \$900.26 million from Italy.

Try ex-education minister for 'ruining Monipur school'

AL MP Kamal Mojumder tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former State Minister for Industries and Awami League MP Kamal Ahmed Mojumder yesterday, in parliament, demanded a trial of former education minister for "destroying Monipur High School and College".

Kamal Mojumder, a lawmaker from Dhaka-15 constituency, alleged that under the patronage of the former minister, whom he didn't mention by name, Jamaat is now running the educational institution.

Social Welfare Minister Dipu Moni held the portfolio of education minister in the last cabinet.

Mojumder highlighted a decline in its academic performance and criticised the appointment of an unfit head teacher allegedly affiliated with Jamaat.

Despite appeals to the Education Ministry, Mojumder claimed no action has been taken.

"I call upon the prime minister to save the school. I built this school step by step on the land allotted by you (PM)."

"I want her to face trial," he said referring to the former education minister.

Internet services to face disruption on March 2 for 12 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Internet services will face partial disruption throughout the country from 7:00am to 7:00pm on March 2, due to maintenance work on the country's first submarine cable.

The circuits of the Singapore side of SEA-ME-WE-4, a submarine communications cable system that connects Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar to Singapore, will remain partially closed during the period, said Bangladesh Submarine Cables PLC (BSCPLC) yesterday.

"During the maintenance period, internet users of BSCPLC may experience temporary slowdowns or interruptions in internet services. We sincerely regret the temporary inconvenience to customers during the maintenance work," it added.



A scuffle breaks out between police and Gonotontro Moncho activists when their procession to protest the price hike of essentials was stopped on its way to the Secretariat near the Zero Point yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Consumers brace for price shocks

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105 a kg, up by Tk 5-10 from two weeks ago; and puffed rice for Tk 70-80, up by Tk 5-10. Traders in Karwan Bazar said that in anticipation of Ramadan, sellers have started hoarding puffed rice.

Prices of the local variety moshur dal have been stable at Tk 140-150 a kg for over a month.

Red meat has been beyond the reach of the lower income group for quite some time. Prices of beef have gone up from Tk 650 a kg two months ago to Tk 750, while mutton is going for Tk 1,100-1,150 now.

The prices of chicken increased recently. Each kg of broiler chicken now sells for Tk 200, sonali chicken between Tk 290 and Tk 330, and the indigenous one between Tk 550 and

600.

Eggs are now at Tk 130-135 per dozen, down by around Tk 5 from recent prices.

Compared to last year, prices of cumin have risen by 32 percent. According to data published by Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Tofayel Ahmed, owner of M/S Al Amin Traders in Karwan Bazar, said, "Isabgol is now Tk 2,000 a kg, up from Tk 900, Rooh Afza is Tk 550 a litre, up from Tk 380 in last Ramadan."

The dual threat of rising electricity prices and spiralling cost of essentials in Ramadan may put consumers in a chokehold that many will struggle to escape.

Expressing worry over the impending rise of electricity prices,

Mahbuba Begum, a retired official of Petrobangla, said, "If electricity bills go up then the price of almost everything follows suit."

Ghulam Rahman, president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said, "The government will point to the devaluation of taka against the US dollar as a reason for the rise in electricity prices. We have spent enormous sums on capacity building and we have resorted to quick rental power – these display a failure to make the right decisions. I implore the government to make the right decisions at the right time, stop wastage, and address the lack of transparency in the sector.

"Our apprehension is that people will suffer in Ramadan."

Barishal set up

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asked to bat first. However, the trend of teams winning by batting second continued as Barishal chased down the target in 18.3 overs with Mushfiqur Rahim hitting an unbeaten 47 off 38 deliveries and in-form Kyle Mayers smashing a 15-ball 28.

Barishal lost two early wickets – losing skipper Tamim and his opening partner Mehedi Hasan Miraz inside the Powerplay – but never looked to be in trouble as Mushfiqur stitched together stands of 47 and 50 with Soumya Sarkar (22 off 18) and Mayers, respectively, to help Barishal's cause.

Meanwhile, in a game that was much-hyped due to a face-off between Shakib and Tamim, neither of the duo could make an impression. While Tamim departed after an eight-ball 10, Shakib's contributions in the game were limited to a four-ball one with the bat and wicketless bowling figures of 17 in just 1.3 overs.

Fans, however, did see some enthralling fireworks with Rangpur's Shamim, who hit five fours and as many maximums on his way to smashing a 20-ball fifty – the joint-fastest fifty with Shakib in this edition of the tournament – standing out in this regard.

Stop extortion

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FBCCI President Mahbubul Alam warned that stern action will be taken against the extortionists with the help of the relevant authorities of the government if the traders report any incidents of extortion at any stage of the supply chain.

A hotline will be opened to receive extortion-related complaints.

"The complaints will be dealt with instantly," Alam said.

Apart from the extortion issues, traders also blamed the middlemen of the supply chain for the higher prices of the essential commodities.

A product changes hands at least four times before coming to the wholesale markets. Due to the presence of the middlemen, the prices of the products increase abnormally.

A strong market monitoring system would have kept the presence of middlemen in check, they said.

Monitoring should be strengthened so that there is no abnormal difference in the prices of products from the wholesale market to the retail level, Alam said.

Action will be taken against those who create artificial crises and extortion in the market, said Amin Helali, a senior vice-president of the FBCCI.

At the meeting, representatives of the producers and suppliers of the different products have assured that the prices of essential commodities will not increase as there is enough stock at present.

There will be no shortage of onions in the market during the upcoming Ramadan as new onions will hit the market in the next 10 days, said Haji Majed, vice-president of Shyambazar Agricultural Commodity Traders Association.

It is not possible to bring down the price of dates as its import duty is almost double the actual price, said Sirajul Islam, president of the Bangladesh Fresh Fruits Importer Association.

To import a kilogram of dates at Tk 110, a Tk 140 duty has to be paid. "That is why the price of dates is so high in the market," he added.

Traders have to pay Tk 43 tax to import a kg of sugar, said Golam Mawla, president of Bangladesh Wholesale Edible Oil Traders Association.

"On the one hand, the government is talking about raising taxes and on the other hand, they are talking about controlling the market. Keeping two policies at a time will not yield any benefit," he said.

Dhaka a vital cog in the wheel

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said Mujibur Rahman Patwary, additional director of the Dhaka Division DNC.

"But they only disclosed their assignment and nothing about the syndicate as it works using a cut-out strategy. One member does not know the other's role or details – this becomes a challenge for investigations," Patwary said.

Soko, Mohamedi and Yenge are the drug mules, who are paid for each successful delivery. Rony was responsible for sending out fake invitations to the African nationals for their visa purposes. For each invitation letter, he would get Tk 40,000 to Tk 1 lakh. Rony has issued at least four invitation letters

to the syndicate's carriers to date.

A similar payment was given to Apel for repacking the consignment for shipping to India, investigators said.

The investigators are now verifying the involvement of these nationals and possible other routes.

"We got some information about the syndicate's other members and transaction details and we are now verifying those," said Md Mehedi Hasan, assistant director of the DNC.

The Narcotics Control Bureau from Nigeria is cooperating with DNC for the investigation, Hasan said.

Bangladesh has been used as a transit route for cocaine smuggling for a decade now. Between 2014

and November last year, 28.72 kg of cocaine has been seized.

Cocaine has no market in Bangladesh, said DNC officials.

In the last decade, the drug rehabilitation centres in Bangladesh hardly had any cocaine addicts.

The officials, however, suspect that India may not be the ultimate destination of the consignments as there are possibilities that these go to European countries from there.

"We often managed to arrest the carriers behind the cocaine smuggling. But they never know anything about the ring or financiers, so the mastermind stays behind. We are hopeful of stopping the syndicate activities this time," said the DNC additional director Patwary.