



### B1 AIIB will provide budget support



### P11 Champions League getting tougher



### P9 Remembering Gabo



### P7 'No Indian troops in Maldives after May 10'

## Bus operators pay Tk 1,059cr a year in bribes

Finds TIB study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Buses pay at least Tk 1,059 crore in illegal tolls and bribes every year, according to the Transparency International Bangladesh.

A section of unscrupulous Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials and staffers, police officers, transport associations, staffers of city corporations and municipalities, and people affiliated with political parties get shares of the bribes and extorted money, said a research report of the TIB.

However, the Tk 1,059 crore was a "very conservative estimate" and that the real figure could be many times more, the TIB said while unveiling its findings at a press conference at its Dhanmondi office yesterday.

It found that people with political affiliations were directly involved in the governing bodies of 92 percent of bus operators.

Of those people, 80 percent belong to Awami League and they often influence policies and ensure benefits for themselves and bus operators, it said.

"The private bus service sector is plagued by irregularities from top to bottom ... This sector is kept hostage by the associations of owners and workers," said Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB.

Workers are not getting their benefits and passengers the expected services, he added.

The TIB carried out the research titled "Integrity in Private Bus Transport Business" between May 2023 and February 2024. It collected information from 701 transport workers, 168 representatives of bus operators or associations, and 696 passengers on travel between September 11 and October 2023.

It also interviewed 37 stakeholders and monitored 51 bus terminals.

It did not include BRTC buses in its survey.

Researchers Md Nuruzzaman Forhad, Farhana Rahman, and Mohammad Nure Alam read out the summary of the findings at the press briefing.

Bus owners and workers have to bribe to get services from the BRTA, TIB said.

Over the last year, bus owners had to spend an average of 30 days, instead of a maximum of 14 days, to get their vehicles registered. They had to bribe an average Tk 12,272 for every vehicle, it said.

They had to spend 13 days on average, instead of the stipulated one to two days, to renew fitness certificates and had to bribe an average Tk 7,635 for each vehicle, it said.

For renewing route permits, they had to wait an average of 45 days, instead of the maximum of 20 days. They also had to bribe an average Tk 5,999, it said.

Over 28 percent of the surveyed workers said they have been accused in one or more cases filed by traffic police or highway police in connection with violating traffic rules.

By bribing police, many owners and workers avoid fines and keep unfit vehicles on roads, operate buses on routes they are not supposed to operate, and avoid requisition of their vehicles by government officials, it said.

About 29 percent of the workers said they bribed traffic or highway police.

On average, each long-haul bus paid Tk 1,019 in bribes over the last

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



Putting up a notice saying the market is closed for construction of an emergency stairway, shopkeepers have blocked the entrance to Abedin Tower on Bailey road. There are several popular restaurants in the building. Right, authorities put a restaurant and a building under lock and key as they lack fire safety.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



## FIRE HAZARDS 6 restaurants, building sealed off in the capital

Govt agencies carry on raids

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government agencies yesterday sealed off six restaurants, a building, and fined nine eateries and a building in the capital.

Drives were conducted for the second consecutive day after a deadly fire at the Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall on the night of February 29 killed 46 people.

The Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) closed four restaurants, fined another eatery and a shopping mall adjacent to the fire-hit building on the capital's Bailey Road.

A team of Rajuk, led by Executive Magistrate Mohammad Monir Hossain Hawlader, shut down Nababi Bhoj, Sultan's Dine, Roaster Café, and Pizza Mastan, and imposed fines on Swiss Bakery and Capital Siraj Centre Shopping Mall.

The shopping mall owner was fined Tk 2 lakh as its documents related to fire safety had expired, the magistrate told reporters.

Nababi Bhoj was sealed off for operating without permission, he added.

The team closed three other eateries - Sultan's Dine, Roaster Café, and Pizza Mastan - as they failed to show the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## Restaurateurs decry ongoing raids

Allege drives aimed at covering up failure of govt agencies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Restaurant owners yesterday protested the sudden drive by government agencies, citing that the raids are affecting their business.

"The way restaurants are raided and people are being arrested after the fire incident at the Bailey Road, we are panicking - the problems cannot be resolved this way," said Imran Hasan, secretary general of the Bangladesh Restaurant Owners' Association.

On February 29, a fire broke out in Bailey Road's Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall that left 46 people dead. The seven-storey building, which housed eight eating joints, had no fire safety measures.

Following the incident, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha has started to conduct drives in commercial buildings for fire safety compliance.

So far, 16 restaurants housed in a 14-storey commercial building and 11 restaurants in a 15-storey building on Satmasjid Road were sealed off along with two restaurants on Bailey Road. The Fire Service and Civil Defence officials sealed off a five-storey building that housed several restaurants in Khilgaon.

The police have arrested at least 21 people after raiding various restaurants in Dhaka's Gulshan, Dhanmondi and Wari areas on March 3. Among them were restaurant owners and employees.

A total of six cases were filed against them alleging misconduct or aiding and abetting of a fire or combustible material in the restaurant.

A comprehensive guideline to operate a restaurant should be in place such that no one can establish restaurants at any place, Hasan

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## BNP an angel of death: PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament yesterday came down heavily on the BNP-Jamaat alliance for carrying out mayhem in the country in the name of their anti-government movement.

"They [BNP-Jamaat] are now complaining to foreigners that their leaders and activists have been held on political grounds despite the fact that they have been arrested on specific charges of patronising, financing, and being directly involved in arson, in which several hundred innocent people were killed."

She said the BNP's criminal acts were comparable to Israel's attack on Palestine and that the party was the angel of death for Bangladesh.

Hasina made the remark while giving her speech and participating in the discussion of the president's thanksgiving motion during the first session of the 12th parliament.

"It will not be possible to pardon those who were involved in such heinous acts. They have to face the music."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



## ESSENTIAL ITEMS Hoarders to face action under Special Powers Act

Warns law minister

STAR REPORT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday warned against hoarding essential commodities, saying action would be taken under the Special Powers Act against those involved.

"If anyone tries to destabilise the market by hoarding commodities, action will be taken against them under the Special Powers Act," he told reporters after attending the 3rd day of the Deputy Commissioners' Conference held at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city, reports UNB.

He also asked the DCs to dispose of the cases filed with mobile courts quickly and sought their help in clearing the backlog of cases.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat said

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



Burnt molasses and sugar falling into the Karnaphuli in Ichhapur area of Chattogram after a fire ripped through a factory of S Alam Refined Sugar Industries on the bank of the river. The fire broke out on Monday afternoon.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## DRAFT GOVT SERVANT (CONDUCT) RULES Govt employees won't need to turn in wealth reports

BAHARAM KHAN

The public administration ministry is pushing to relax a provision in the law that stipulates the submission of annual wealth statements every five years by public servants - a move that can encourage corruption among the 14 lakh government employees.

The ministry now proposes that the government, if needed, collects the employees' wealth statements from their annual tax returns to the National Board of Revenue instead of getting it straight from the employees.

It also suggests that those who do not file their income tax return will have to submit their wealth statement in a prescribed form every December.

The ministry has proposed these in the draft amendment to the Government Servant (Conduct) Rules 1979.

Titled "Government Servant (Conduct) Rules 2022", the draft has been vetted by the law ministry. It will be placed to the secretary committee on administrative development affairs, The Daily Star has learnt from officials involved with the matter.

The draft rules define a public servant as anyone engaged in the service of the Republic as per the "Bangladesh Public Service Act-2018".

But those working in railway as well as the lower grade staff in police and a section of the Border Guard Bangladesh and Coast Guard will be outside the purview of the rules.

According to section 13 of the existing rules, the civil servants are bound to make a declaration of all movable and immovable property, shares, certificates, insurance

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5