



Even 24 hours after Friday's heavy rains, many areas in the capital remained waterlogged exposing the poor drainage system. These photographs were taken yesterday afternoon in the Buet Staff Quarters, *left*, in front of DU's SM Hall, *top right*, and on Hussein Dalan Road in Old Dhaka.

PHOTOS: RASHED SHUMON, AMRAH HOSSAIN, PALASH KHAN,

Govt may go for quota reforms

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leaders publicly issued warnings against blocking the roads and highways, police have been asked to show restraint and go soft on the demonstrators until they resort to vandalism, said police sources.

A top official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said they were instructed to show maximum restraint and not to engage in any confrontation with the students.

"But police will be on high alert to avoid any unpleasant situation," the official said.

The government will continue the pressure on the protesters to keep them off the streets, as the countrywide demonstrations and transport blockades are affecting the public.

Warnings by ministers and filing of cases against unnamed demonstrators are part of that strategy, government sources said.

Meanwhile, the protesters yesterday announced fresh programmes for today. Instead of blockade, they will bring out processions, march towards the Bangabhaban and DC offices, and boycott classes and examinations across the country.

According to sources, the students have softened their position to avoid possible police action since they want to continue the protests until their demands are met.

Addressing a press conference at Dhaka University yesterday, Hasnat Abdullah, a student of the university and one of the coordinators of the anti-discrimination student movement, said they will march towards the Bangabhaban today to submit a memorandum to President Mohammed Shahabuddin.

He said their peers in districts will also hand over memorandums to respective deputy commissioners for placing them to the president. And their boycott of classes and exams will continue too.

"The government is making plans and preparations to suppress our movement. We have been protesting peacefully," said Nahid Islam, another organiser of the protests.

The government should have resolved the crisis through discussions with the students at the beginning. If anything goes wrong, it must shoulder the responsibility, he said.

Meanwhile, police yesterday filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station against unnamed protesters on charges of vandalising police vehicles and assaulting law enforcers during a demonstration in Shahbagh on Thursday.

Khalilur Rahman, a driver of the transport department of Rajarbagh Police Lines, filed the case.

DMP Additional Commissioner (detective branch) Harun Or Rashid said they are investigating if any infiltrators are trying to take advantage of the situation and divert the movement in other directions.

Students at public universities and colleges, along with jobseekers, have been demonstrating against the quota system in government jobs for the last two weeks. They occupied key city intersections, major highways, and rail lines.

The protests began after the High Court on June 5 ruled that the 2018 government circular abolishing the quota system was illegal, effectively reinstating the quota system. The government appealed against the decision, and the Supreme Court has issued a status quo on the HC order.

In 2018, the government issued a circular abolishing the quota system for Class 1 and Class 2 jobs, in the wake of massive protests by students, who wanted reform and not an abolition.

Until then, 56 percent of government jobs had been reserved for candidates from various quotas. Of them, 30 percent were for freedom fighters' families, 10 percent for women, 10 percent for people from

underdeveloped districts, 5 percent for members of indigenous communities, and 1 percent for persons with disabilities.

According to sources, a good number of AL leaders also favour quota reform.

During unscheduled discussions at the party president's Dhanmondi office yesterday, some leaders said there is a groundswell of public support for the quota reform demonstrations, and any police action on students will foment anti-government sentiment.

During the discussions, an AL leader said some people are labelling all the agitating students as "children of razakars", but this is not fair. Such sweeping generalisations might backfire, the leader pointed out.

Talking to this newspaper, several other AL leaders also said it was time to reform the quota system.

The Public Service Commission data shows that before the quota was abolished, only around 9 percent of the posts set aside for freedom fighters' families were filled and the rest 21 percent remained vacant, they say.

"If this is the reality, then why should the government take a beating for the 30 percent quota for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren. Even many Chhatra League leaders support the protesters," an AL leader told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader at a press conference yesterday put emphasis on the necessity of the quota system in the country's current context.

Mentioning that quota system in government jobs exists in a number of South Asian countries, he said the participation of women and members of marginalised communities in Bangladesh's public services steadily declined in recent years in the absence of quota system.

Finding hope in hair!

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of women in groups, processing the hair that was bought from across the country.

Hafizul Islam, the owner of Antor-Aniq Hair Fashion in Nawabganj, has been involved in the business for last eight years.

"Our workers travel all over the country to buy hair from villages, towns and cities. These are then brought to the factory and processed. After processing, the loose hair is sent to many places in the country and even other countries, including China. There, the processed hair get the final polish and are sent again to different countries, including Bangladesh, to be manufactured into wigs."

He estimates that around 200 people from 15 villages are employed in his factory in Nawabganj alone, with approximately 17,000 women benefiting from this industry in the upazila under 250 traders like him. He informed that there are many more hair processing centres in other parts of Dinajpur.

The impact of the hair processing industry extends beyond employment.

Villagers like Afzal Hossain gets to earn an extra Tk 2,500 a month for renting his space out to accommodate a hair processing centre in Nawabganj's Jagannathpur.

"To be able to rent out a space in such a rural area is a rare opportunity," he said.

In Chirirbandar's Ranibandar Bazar area, at least 10,000 men and women were seen working in hair processing. Those whose skills are far more enhanced than others can earn up to Tk 15,000 to 20,000 per month. However, the number of such workers is still low.

Rasheda Begum, who works in a centre in the area, explained the process, "We sort, clean, trim, and bundle the hair ... Then it's dyed, washed and dried in a separate factory, and graded to make Remy hair, which is highly valued in the market."

Remy hair is where the cuticles are kept intact and facing the same direction and are not stripped, making it the highest grade of real human hair extensions.

The market value of processed loose hair varies significantly, with prices ranging from Tk 5,000 per kg of 6-inch hair to Tk 8,000 per kg of 22-23 inches.

Rashidul Islam, another hair processing factory owner in Chirirbandar, attributes the sector's rapid growth to both local initiatives and foreign investments, particularly from China.

However, despite the industry's promise, workers' wages are still comparatively low.

Anwara Begum and Shahida Banu expressed concerns over the adequacy of their earnings amidst rising living costs.

"We work hard, but Tk 80-120 per day isn't enough to support our families anymore," Anwara lamented.

Laila Banu, vice chairman of Chirirbandar upazila and an entrepreneur, also emphasised the need for better wages and protection for the workers.

"The industry is profitable and is contributing to our economy, but the workers deserve a fair amount of money for their hard work. They also need better working conditions as many of the centres end up becoming unhygienic."

Motiar Rahman, who rose from being an unemployed villager to a successful entrepreneur employing 100 workers in his factory in Chirirbandar, said it was sometimes a hassle to source good quality and proper lengths of hair, and appealed for government support to import hair from other countries to further boost the industry.

As the hair processing industry in Dinajpur continues to grow, it brings with it both opportunities and challenges.

"Its transformative power is evident in the changing lives of thousands of villagers but also highlights the need for fair labour practices, adequate wages and protection for the workers to ensure its sustainable growth and equitable benefits for all those involved," Laila Banu said.

Israeli strike on 'safe zone'

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the nearby Nasser Hospital, which hospital officials said had been overwhelmed and was "no longer able to function" due to the intensity of the Israeli offensive and an acute shortage of medical supplies.

Separately, at least 20 Palestinians were killed in an Israeli attack on a prayer hall at a Gaza camp for displaced people in west Gaza City, Palestinian health and civil emergency officials said.

Univ teachers to carry on strike today

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Teachers from over 35 public universities under the FBUTA have been abstaining from work since July 1, protesting the introduction of the "Protoy" pension scheme. They also demanded the inclusion of professors in the "super grade" (equivalent to the pay grade of a senior secretary) and introduction of a separate pay scale for public university teachers.

The same day, the Inter-University Officers' Federation also joined the movement boycotting work.

Quader, also the AL general secretary, yesterday said there was a confusion regarding the "Protoy" pension scheme to be effective from July this year, but in fact it would be in force from July next year.

Prof Nizamul Haque Bhuiyan, secretary general of the FBUTA, told journalists that their talks with the government representatives "went well".

He said they would decide their next course of action after consulting the leaders of the teachers' associations and all federations.

Under the Protoy pension scheme, 10 percent of the monthly basic salary of an employee, up to Tk 5,000, will be deducted and given to their pension fund. Besides, there will be no one-time gratuity for retirees.

However, under the present pension system, no money is deducted from the employees' salary and it also allows a five percent annual increment of the pension and encashment of the earned leave.

Teachers claimed that their financial benefits will be reduced in the new

Over 38,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military offensive in the enclave since October 7, according to the enclave's health ministry.

In a statement, Hamas said the Israeli claims that it had targeted Mohammed Deif, the military chief of the group, were false and aimed at justifying the attack.

Deif has survived seven Israeli assassination attempts, the most recent in 2021 and has topped Israel's

most wanted list for decades over the deaths of dozens of Israelis in suicide bombings.

The Israeli military said that the strike against Deif also targeted Rafa Salama, the commander of Hamas' Khan Younis Brigade.

The Israeli army said operations were continuing in southeast Gaza City as well as "targeted, intelligence-based" missions in Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip.

STALEMATE CONTINUES

The two-week movement has halted the activities of almost all public universities across the country. Students fear that this may lead to session jams.

As public universities officials and employees abstain from work, many current and former students cannot collect or submit the necessary documents.

Farid Hossain, a former Rajshahi University students, yesterday said he needed to send his original educational certificates to a university abroad to attend classes there this month, but he could not get those as the administrative building was shut down for about two weeks.

Many other public university students could not collect documents as almost all administrative and academic activities were suspended.

The RU authorities postponed their undergraduate admission process on July 1 citing "unavoidable reasons". They also deferred the start of the first-year honours classes.

Students at Comilla University have expressed frustration at the stalemate. No classes were held at the university for about two months since early May, following a conflict between the teachers and the vice-chancellor over an untoward incident at the latter's office.

Israt Jahan Bonna, a final year (honours) student of English, told The Daily Star, "The university was reopened on June 23 after about two months, but the academic activities are being hampered again due to the teachers' movement."

Waterlogging forever?

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argue that the city corporations need to adopt more effective planning and management strategies to address this issue.

Mujibur blamed the filling up of waterbodies, canals, and lakes, as well as the poor drainage network for the persistent waterlogging.

He added that climate change will bring on more intense rains for shorter periods, which will further worsen the situation.

"The city corporations need to enhance their capacities, develop skills, increase manpower, and implement institutional reforms.

"A master plan is needed to restore canals and waterbodies, and create a primary drainage system."

Dhaka currently has a network of 2,211 kilometers of drains, with 961km in the south and 1,250km in the north. Before the city corporations assumed responsibility, efforts to stop waterlogging were primarily focused on open drains.

Now, the corporations are responsible also for canals and drains, requiring substantial financial investments.

In the last four years, the DNCC spent Tk 370 crore, and the DSCC spent Tk 360 crore. Despite these efforts, areas like Shantinagar, where around Tk 100 crore was spent, still experience severe waterlogging.

Experts said many canals, once crucial for drainage, have been encroached upon and narrowed over time. After independence, Dhaka had 57 canals, but this number has decreased to 26, most of which are in poor condition.

DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam said some areas still face waterlogging due to waste accumulation in the drains, adding that strict action will be taken against those who dispose of waste into canals and drains.

DSCC Chief Executive Officer Mizanur Rahman said that habitual dumping of polythene and plastic wastes by city dwellers is another key reason for the poor drainage.

He added that ongoing development projects by various service agencies also contribute to the problem.

A 2019 study by Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) revealed that Dhaka has lost 4.38 percent of its waterbodies

over the last 20 years.

Adil Mohammad Khan, president of BIP, said a lack of qualitative change in urban planning and management is a major reason behind waterlogging.

He stressed the need for public involvement in initiatives to address the issue.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, criticised the authorities concerned for not taking appropriate legal action against the housing companies that encroached lowlands.

She called for comprehensive plans to resolve the problem and urged the city corporations to focus more on nature-based drainage systems.

Sharif Jamil, member secretary of Dhoritro Rokkhai Amra, another environmental organisation, said, "Spending money without identifying the proper reasons [behind waterlogging] leads to the money being wasted. No project can solve waterlogging problems without considering the importance of nature."

"If the projects don't solve the problem, then the corporations should identify the reasons for their failure."