



GP staffers kept locked inside office for 13hrs

Ex-employees block entrance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dozens of former Grameenphone employees staged a protest at GP House, the company's headquarters in the capital's Bashundhara area, claiming they were illegally dismissed and denied their rightful benefits.

The protesters kept the building's entrance blocked, preventing hundreds of employees from leaving the Grameenphone office until 12:00am today.

"We are going out of GP House now. The protesters have left the scene," a high official of Grameenphone, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star at around 12:15am today.

However, he could not give any more detail.

They alleged that Grameenphone ignored a government directive and, instead of distributing 5 percent of its profits to workers, filed a writ petition with the High Court.

Despite a court ruling and ongoing protests, the company only paid the

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A group of former beneficiaries of the government's family card programme for low-income people show their now-invalid cards during a demonstration in the Kaunia area of Barishal city yesterday. The Trading Corporation of Bangladesh revoked the cards that allowed them to buy essentials at subsidised prices. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

300 lockers of BB officials to be opened

ACC gets court approval

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted permission to the Anti-Corruption Commission to open lockers of over 300 incumbent and former officials of Bangladesh Bank.

"The lockers will be opened in the presence of a judicial magistrate. If there are undisclosed assets in those lockers, legal action will be taken against them," ACC Public Prosecutor Mahmud Hossain Jahangir told The Daily Star.

Judge Md Zakir Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order after ACC Director Kazi Saemuzzaman, who is leading the inquiry team, submitted an application in this regard.

Jahangir moved the application on behalf of the anti-graft body.

In the application, the ACC official said on January 26 they opened a locker of former deputy governor SK Sur Chowdhury kept at the central bank and found €55,000, \$169,300, 1 kg of gold, and Tk 70 lakh in Fixed

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Free healthcare for all if BNP voted to power

Says the party, proposes allocating 5% of GDP for health sector

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has proposed allocating at least five percent of the Gross Domestic Product to reform the health sector, as part of a set of suggestions it unveiled yesterday.

The proposals also include recruiting "rural health assistants" to increase rural employment, and introducing a "health card" programme to provide free medical treatment for everyone.

These recommendations were presented as part of the party's draft of the "National Health Sector Reform Proposal" at a press conference held at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office yesterday.

Standing Committee member Khandaker Mosharraf said that if the BNP comes to power, it will ensure free healthcare for everyone, similar to the system in the UK.

"If the BNP is elected to form the government, the party will implement all its reform proposals," said Mosharraf, who was the health minister during the BNP-led four-party alliance government's tenure.

"We don't believe an interim government will be able to implement these reforms, as it will not have the time."

In line with "Universal Health Coverage" for comprehensive health protection, the BNP has suggested health sector reforms in the 26th clause of its 31-point outline, which the party describes as a plan to repair the state structure.

Mosharraf outlined the health plan, which includes five dozen proposals classified as short-term, medium-term, and long-term initiatives.

In the short-term plan (1-3 years), the BNP focuses on strengthening primary healthcare services, where the key initiatives include recruiting a required number of "rural health assistants", with 70 percent women, upgrading upazila health complexes to 100-bed facilities, equipping hospitals with tools like X-ray, ECG, and ultrasound machines.

The medium-term (1-5 years) proposals include introducing a

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SEDITION CASE HC rejects Chinmoy's bail petition

Asks authorities to explain why he should not be granted bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday did not grant bail to Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, a former ISKCON leader, in a sedition case lodged over disrespecting the national flag.

The court, however, issued a rule asking the state to explain in two weeks why Chinmoy should not be granted bail in this case.

The law secretary, home secretary, and deputy commissioner of Chattogram have been named as respondents in the rule.

The bench of Justice Md Atoar Rahman and Justice Md Ali Reza issued the rule after holding a hearing on a petition filed by Chinmoy seeking bail in the case.

Chinmoy cannot get released from jail following the HC order, his principal lawyer, Advocate Apurba

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US-China trade war escalates

Beijing imposes tariffs on US energy, autos

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday said it would impose tariffs on imports of US energy, vehicles and equipment, firing a return salvo in an escalating trade war between the world's two biggest economies.

US President Donald Trump on Saturday announced sweeping measures against major trade partners Canada and Mexico, with goods from China hit with an additional 10 percent tariff on top of the duties they already endure.

Minutes after they came into effect, Beijing unveiled levies of 15 percent on imports of coal and liquefied natural gas from the United States, while crude oil, agricultural machinery, big-engined vehicles, and pickup trucks face 10 percent duties.

China is a major market for US energy exports and according to Beijing customs data, imports of oil, coal and LNG totalled more than \$7 billion last year.

But that is dwarfed by China's imports from more friendly powers such as Russia, from which it purchased \$94 billion-worth last year.

Beijing said the measures were in response to the "unilateral tariff hike" by Washington.

The US decision, China said, "seriously violates World Trade Organization rules, does nothing to resolve its own problems, and disrupts normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the United States".

With that in mind, Beijing said it would file

a complaint with the WTO over the "malicious" levies.

Alongside its tariffs, China announced a probe into US tech giant Google and the addition of US fashion group PVH Corp. -- which owns Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein -- and biotech giant Illumina to a list of "unreliable entities".

Beijing also unveiled fresh export controls on rare metals and chemicals including tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, and molybdenum, used in a range of industrial appliances.

"I think the retaliation is not aggressive, as China only targets some US products, in response to the US tariff on all China's exports to the US," Zhang Zhiwei of Pinpoint Asset Management said in a note.

"This is likely only the beginning of a long process for the two countries to negotiate"

Trump has said his tariffs aimed to punish countries for failing to halt flows of illegal migrants and drugs including fentanyl into the United States.

But he said Monday that he planned a call with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in the next 24 hours.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had both earlier struck last-minute deals with Trump to tighten border measures against the flow of migrants and fentanyl into the United States, leading to a 30-day pause on threatened tariffs.

Former BSEC chairman Shibli Rubayat arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested Prof Shibli Rubayat-Ul-Islam, the former chairman of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC).

He was arrested around 10:30 from Dhanmondi in connection with a case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), said Rezaul Karim Mallick, additional commissioner of the Detective Branch of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, while speaking to The Daily Star.

Shibli, a faculty member of Dhaka University, resigned from his position on August 10 last year, just five days after the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in a mass uprising.

He was initially appointed as the chairman of the BSEC in 2020 and was reappointed for a four-year term in May last year.

This latest development follows the government's

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Beximco lays off another 8,000 workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Embattled Beximco Limited has announced another round of layoffs citing a lack of work orders, a decision that affects nearly 8,000 workers across five manufacturing units in its industrial park in Gazipur.

The layoffs at Beximco Yarn-2, Textiles, Denim, Knitting and RR Washing will become effective today, according to layoff notices issued by the Beximco authorities yesterday.

The workers will be paid salaries as per the labour law; half of their basic salaries and some other benefits during the 45-day layoff period, the Beximco authorities said.

Labour Secretary AHM Shafiquzzaman told The Daily Star that the laid-off workers will be placed in various factories after Beximco settles their dues.

"We are not receiving any work orders from local manufacturers, leaving us with no choice but to declare layoffs," said Osman Kaiser Chowdhury, managing director of Beximco Limited.

Earlier on December 15 last year, the labour and employment ministry advised Beximco, whose vice-chairman Salman F Rahman has been in jail since August 13 last year, to proceed with the layoffs as the government could no longer provide indefinite financial assistance, he said.

"We requested that four factories under Beximco Limited remain open to meet work orders from local manufacturers. But those orders never materialised."

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After the tumultuous days of July, August and the subsequent period of uncertainty, the import of goods has picked up pace ahead of Ramadan, which is less than a month away. The photo of workers unloading goods at a jetty was taken at Anu Majhir Ghat in Chattogram city yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

19-year-old girl dies by suicide

Family says it happened after she was assaulted by a man in public

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A 19-year-old college student died by suicide at her home on Monday night after she was physically assaulted by a man at a restaurant in Bauphal of Patuakhali, family members and police said yesterday.

Iti Das was a student of literature at BM College in Barishal. She used to live with her parents and younger sister in the Daspara area of Bauphal upazila.

Her grieving father Samir Das said she went to a nearby temple for Saraswati Puja around midday.

After puja, Iti and a friend of hers went to a

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