

MY DHAKA

# Inside Dhaka's competitive hierarchy of misery

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Before I start, let me acknowledge something our beloved Dhaka does with unsettling efficiency: it turns almost anything into a competition.

Be it overtaking in traffic lanes, gently ignoring the concept of queues at elevators, or using the horn as a full-fledged communication system – nothing here is too small, too trivial, or too unnecessary to be turned into a contest.

And, inevitably, our daily hardship did not escape this civic enthusiasm. If anything, it may be the only category where we are truly world-class – with our informal storytelling!

Confused so far? Let me elaborate!

We all know how Dhaka is a city where even a "short trip" requires emotional preparation. And by preparation, I mean serious preparation – with a water bottle, sunglasses or umbrella, and at least one existential crisis. Time here is not measured in minutes, but in traffic signals survived.

However, we have adapted!

No... not by fixing anything structural, but by developing a response that is far more immediate and, frankly, far more satisfying: complaining!

Not officially, of course, there are no forms to fill... but verbally, often generously and, if needed, aggressively! I realised this the other day when I



IMAGE: AI GENERATED

made an avoidable mistake by saying, "I'm exhausted" to one of my colleagues.

My reasoning, I believed, was sound. A 90-minute commute from Dhanmondi to Banani. Ninety. Minutes. Ninety minutes is a full movie, with a lot of character development.

But my colleague, however, was unimpressed.

"Ninety minutes?" she scoffed. "I left Uttara at 7:00 AM. I've finished an entire podcast series on the fall of the Roman Empire. At one point, I reached self-actualisation. At another, I considered starting my office in the back of my car. So, you my dear, were practically teleported by comparison."

And just like that, my suffering was downgraded from a "valid complaint" to just an "anecdote."

Why?

Because this is Dhaka. Here, hardship is not something you simply experience and mention – it is something you must substantiate. Preferably with evidence, duration, and a supporting anecdote.

You say you have a headache; someone else has already endured a full-blown migraine, a power fluctuation, or a traffic jam long enough to develop a quiet, complicated bond with the driver.

So, your bad day is never quite bad enough here – because there is always

someone, almost clinically prepared, to counter it with a composed little verdict: "Had it worse." Not as empathy. Not as solidarity. More like a gentle correction to your version of reality.

There is, of course, a strange kind of comfort in it. If everyone is suffering, no one is uniquely singled out.

You say your day was long; someone else says theirs started yesterday and is still buffering.

And somewhere in that exchange, the complaint stops being just a complaint – it becomes participation. A way of saying: I am here. I endured this too. Let me add my version to the pile.

So maybe that's the answer. We don't just complain because things are hard here in Dhaka. That would be far too simple.

We complain because, in a city where very little is predictable and even less is fixable on demand, hardship has quietly become one of the few languages we all speak fluently, confidently, and often, with unnecessary elaboration.

It is how we relate. It is how we compete. It is how we make sense of days that refuse to go as planned.

And perhaps, more tellingly, it is how we reassure ourselves that whatever we went through today, however inefficient, inconvenient, or mildly absurd – it counted for something. Anything!

## 'Water congestion, not waterlogging'

### LGRD state minister tells JS about Chattogram situation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The recent inundation of streets in Chattogram after heavy downpours was "water congestion, not waterlogging", State Minister for LGRD Mir Shahe Alam said yesterday.



In a statement given in parliament under section 300 of rules of procedure, he said the water congestion occurred at five spots of the port city. Shahe Alam also alleged that reports of the port city being submerged were "utterly baseless, and imaginary. "Old photos from 2024 were circulated to spread misinformation," he said.

The state minister said he visited Chattogram before joining parliament yesterday on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's instructions after Tarique, while answering a supplementary question in the House, had apologised to the residents of the city for their suffering.

"When I spoke to people on the streets, they said they were happy that the PM had apologised to Chattogram residents. They took it very positively, saying that compared to one or two years ago, waterlogging has reduced," Shahe Alam said.

Chattogram has 57 canals, of which 36 are being developed under a Tk 12,000 crore project implemented by the army through the Chattogram Development Authority, the state minister said.

Work on 30 canals has been completed, while six are ongoing, according to him.

Temporary embankments or barricades built during the work caused the water congestion after heavy rainfall, Shahe Alam explained.

Chattogram recorded 220 millimetres of rainfall on Wednesday, leading to water congestion at the city's Prabartak Mor and four other points, he said.

After joint efforts, the water was cleared within three to four hours, and by yesterday, there was no water on the streets, the state minister said.

A combined committee led by Mayor Shahadat Hossain was formed yesterday to take immediate action if such incidents recur, the state minister said.

Work on the six canals with embankments has been halted, and instructions have been given to restore water flow within five days, he said.

"For the next monsoon season, we can assure that there'll be no possibility of waterlogging in Chattogram city unless there is extreme rainfall or tidal surge," he added.

## Solutions lie in talks with opposition

FROM PAGE 1

He said parliament must focus on delivering education and healthcare facilities, resolving the electricity crisis, and creating new jobs.

He said, "History can be debated endlessly. But such debates cannot soothe the mind of a mother whose child is suffering from measles, nor can they provide jobs for the unemployed. We must ensure employment for young people and medicines for children affected by measles."

Tarique added, "If we cannot maintain stability, if we cannot strengthen the economy, especially in the present context where this parliament began governing the country with a loan of Tk 30 lakh crore, then we cannot move the nation forward."

"Without a stable government, without a stable parliament, we cannot advance. To take the country forward, both sides must work together."

**ACT ON TEESTA, END EXTORTION: SHAFIQU**

Shafiqur Rahman, ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami and leader of the opposition in parliament, in his concluding speech, said they respect the constitution as law-abiding citizens.

"Some try to claim that we do not respect the constitution. But if we did not, how could we be here? We are law-abiding citizens. If we dislike the constitution, we may wage a movement – but we will not revolt," he said.

He demanded visible progress in implementing the proposed Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project.

"When I went to the Teesta basin, I saw the hardship of people there. In the dry season, there is no water. In the monsoon, it drowns; in the dry season, it burns. This is how their lives go on."

"We have heard many stories about the Teesta mega plan. Now we want visible work, not stories. I strongly urge the government to take bold decisions on this. I assure you, 20 crore people will stand beside the government."

He said, "Extortion is rampant across the country. Not only roadside vendors, but even business owners are forced to pay to run their shops.... Let us pledge from this parliament to make Bangladesh free of extortion, at any cost."

He added, "I will not compare whether law and order has improved or worsened. I only want you to live in a safe Bangladesh today. Educational institutions must be kept free of all terrorism. We do not want to see any more students killed by machetes or bullets. Children must enter schools and come out as skilled, moral citizens."

He said, "The war continues, the world is unstable. This crisis is not created by the government. It is global. But our foreign policy must be independent: Bangladesh first. We want boundless friendship, but no masters. Our foreign policy must be based on dignity, equality, and mutual respect."

He said that "every crime of the fascist era, including killings,

disappearances, torture, rape, violations of humanity", must be tried, and there must be justice for Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, a July uprising frontliner slain while preparing to contest the national polls.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said, "... This constitution is our existence, our emotion, and it is tied to the blood of millions of martyrs of 1971."

Many sections and chapters of the constitution have been repeatedly altered, yet "it remains our constitution, the one for which we fought. As Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed rightly said, the president is not just an individual, he is an institution. Without the president after August 5, the state would have plunged into extreme disorder and anarchy, and it is doubtful whether we could have saved the nation."

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Syed Abdullah Mohammed Taher cautioned if anyone ignores what is beneficial for the country and instead uses a two-thirds majority to do whatever they wish, then the nation will fall behind again.

On the July charter, he said 31 political parties came together to draft it, but later, it was said that whichever party gained a majority would also have its own agenda. "That was never part of our discussion. It amounts to a betrayal of the July charter."

On the Islami Bank, he said, "The Jamaat-e-Islami has no bank. None of our MPs are directors of Islami Bank, nor have we rescheduled loans. Islami Bank was the product of honest and enterprising people. If you say we had a role in its management, we accept that."

**'BNP COMPROMISED ON CHARTER'**

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed termed the July Charter Implementation Order "illegal".

The BNP had refrained from speaking out during the issuance of the order by the interim government for the sake of elections, he said.

"We compromised on everything and signed the July National Charter out of compulsion ... what if they blocked the election with the excuse of reforms."

"If they [opposition] find satisfaction in treating constitutional amendment as reform, then what is the problem? By refusing to join the committee [constitution amendment committee], does it mean the constitution, as it stands after the 15th amendment, will simply continue unchanged?"

He noted that the first decision in the consensus commission was to amend article 70 of the constitution. "There was no question of a note of dissent. On the day the decision was taken, it was agreed that the charter would be drafted with notes of dissent included. And so it was signed."

Addressing the opposition, he said, "You signed it. We signed it. Let us now implement the July charter."

He argued that the subsequent implementation order was

unconstitutional and invalid. He recalled that BNP's standing committee had held a press conference in Gulshan declaring that the party and its allies would accept nothing outside the charter.

"I would remind my young friends that one party exhausted itself by selling the spirit of 1971 and was forced to flee. Let us not turn the spirit of July into political merchandise. July belongs to all of us," the home minister said.

About freedom of speech, he warned, "What is happening today in the name of free expression on social media – if it is not controlled, if we do not restrain ourselves, I do not know where this nation will end up. Some voices are inside the country, some abroad, some even within households. It seems they alone have freedom of speech, while the rest of us are helpless. If you counter them, the abuse only increases."

He criticised personal attacks, saying dragging the prime minister's wife and daughter into vile narratives in the name of freedom will not take us forward. "It will destroy our culture."

Responding to Jamaat leader Taher's claim that Jamaat has no bank, Salahuddin said, "They say they have no bank. Yet, when speaking, they claim ownership and take credit. Having a bank is not bad, why deny it?"

Ninety-four bills were passed during the first session of the 13th Jatiya Sangsad.

Two adjournment motions, one on convening a Constitutional Reform Council in line with the July Charter Implementation Order, and the other on the charter's implementation process, were discussed.

The opposition staged four walkouts, including one protesting President Mohammed Shahabuddin's opening address.

Indian envoy summoned over Assam CM's remarks

FROM PAGE 1

afternoon, an official told UNB. Bangladesh described the remarks as "disparaging".

The move came after Himanta, in an interview aired by ABP News on April 15, said pushing back even one Bangladeshi is "not an easy thing" because "Bangladesh police" were also stationed at the border.

"You cannot just go and hand them over, they do not accept; there is no extradition treaty between India and Bangladesh."

When the interviewer asked how they were then sent back, the minister said, "Taking advantage of the night's darkness, in places where the BDR [now BGB – Border Guard Bangladesh] is not present, we push those people back."

When the interviewer expressed shock, he admitted, "Yes, that is how we do it."

The Border Guard Bangladesh was originally formed as the Bangladesh

## New law excludes supervisors

FROM PAGE 1

introduced an addendum stating that "regardless of whether they are designated as an employee or an officer", a person exchanging labour for remuneration is a worker. This explicitly included those with supervisory duties.

The only exception was a person responsible for the management or control of the establishment, who would be considered the employer.

For about five months, supervisors and managers explicitly enjoyed rights including termination benefits, paid maternity leave, and collective bargaining.

However, on April 10 this year, parliament passed an amended version of the ordinance as the new Labour Act 2026, omitting managers and supervisors from the definition of a worker.

The current definition of a worker is "any person, including an apprentice, regardless of whether the terms of their employment are express or implied, who is employed in any establishment or industry, either directly or through a contractor [...]" however, all persons shall be included herein except for any person appointed under sub clause [b] of clause [49] of section 2."

Section 2 (49)(b) of the act states that an "owner" includes any person responsible for the management, supervision, and control of the establishment.

Critics argue that this reclassifies those with supervisory duties as part of management, rather than the workforce.

For example, someone who supervises cooks in a cafeteria kitchen, or oversees a fleet of drivers for a rental car agency, can be deprived of labour rights by the actual owners of the establishment. To challenge this, they would need to go to a labour court.

The labour reform commission, formed by the interim government, in its final report submitted to the then chief adviser, recommended tightening the definition of "owner" in the law.

The commission, chaired by Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, executive

director of the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, recommended replacing the word "owner" in the law with "employer", stating that this should "refer only to that person who holds the final authority regarding the appointment of personnel, dismissal from service, and determination of the terms of employment".

The commission's final report further said, "All persons in administrative or management roles falling outside this definition shall be considered officers".

"The labour law shall apply to everyone except the 'employer', and they shall come under the purview of legal rights and protections applicable under the labour law."

AKM Nasim, country programme director of Solidarity Centre Bangladesh and a member of the now-

Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati and also a member of the reform commission, said this part of the new law rolls back who is entitled to legal rights as a worker.

"This change was made with the readymade garments sector in mind, so that companies do not have to extend labour rights to line chiefs and supervisors. But we need to think beyond just the garments sector. This labour law applies to the entire workforce of the country."

Additionally, though the interim-era ordinance allowed unions and collective bargaining agents to represent workers in court, Solidarity Centre, upon review, found that the newly passed law no longer allows this.

Kalpna Akhter, executive director of Bangladesh Center for Workers' Solidarity, said, "Typically the labour



**"This change was made with the garments sector in mind, allowing companies to avoid extending labour rights to supervisors.... But the law applies to the country's entire workforce."**

TASLIMA AKHTER, coordinator of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati

defunct labour reform commission, said the amendment to the ordinance passed by parliament on April 10 was introduced suddenly.

"The definition in the interim-era ordinance was agreed upon during discussions at the Tripartite Consulting Council [TCC]. This new change doesn't reflect those discussions."

The TCC was a 60-member committee comprising representatives from workers, employers, and the government, activated in 2025 to amend the labour law, among other things.

Taslima Akhter, coordinator of the

leaders could represent workers as their lawyers in court to ease their access to justice. We are looking at this change critically, but we are waiting for the labour rules to be published, which would better flesh out how this change will impact workers' access to the labour courts."

Meanwhile, large establishments are no longer required to provide provident funds. The previous ordinance made provident funds mandatory in establishments with over 100 employees. Provident funds are now only mandatory if two-thirds of workers demand them.



Himanta Biswa Sarma Rifles (BDR) and renamed BGB in 2010.

He also said, "You don't know the truth. What does the BSF do? The BSF holds a person for 10, 20, even 40 days, and when they find a spot where the BDR is not guarding, they push them across."

The interviewer then asked, "Then they must be able to come back too?" He replied, "Yes, some also come back from Bengal."

He reiterated, "There is no

extradition treaty between India and Bangladesh through which we can return a Bangladeshi. Bangladesh asks for proof...."

Referring to Assam's National Register of Citizens process, he claimed 1.7 million "infiltrators" had been identified prima facie.

Himanta said that if authorities tried to proceed officially, the matter would go through India's Ministry of External Affairs and then to Bangladesh, which, according to him, often refused to accept them as Bangladeshi citizens.

"Then what is the option open for us?"

When questioned over the low official deportation numbers, he said 1,400 people had been pushed back this year following a Supreme Court judgment delivered last year.

He claimed the ruling allowed a district magistrate to pass an eviction order if a person was believed not to be Indian.

Asked where they should be

evicted, the chief minister said, "The law and the court order do not specify where they should be evicted to, so we have started using this to push them back at the border."

Asked what "push back" meant, Himanta said, "It means you take them to a convenient place and practically push [dhakka] them."

He added, "We should push them back, but also create an atmosphere so that they leave Assam on their own. When I talk about the '5 rupees vs 4 rupees' example, the meaning is that society should not accept these Bangladeshis."

On April 26, Himanta, in a post on X, said, "Rude people don't understand soft language. We continuously remind ourselves of this prophetic line when we expel infiltrators from Assam who don't leave themselves. For instance, these 20 illegal Bangladeshis who were PUSHED BACK last night. Assam will fight. Pushback WILL CONTINUE."