

'Hilsa train' that never reaches Sylhet on time

Gangs in connivance with BR men stop vans at every stop from Chandpur

MORSHED ALI KHAN, back from Chandpur

Irregularities and delays in Bangladesh Railway (BR) services between Chandpur and Sylhet are causing serious disruption in supply of hilsa to greater Sylhet region, leaders of the hilsa traders in Chandpur said.

According to the traders, almost every day they are suffering losses due to long delays on the way, allegedly caused by a section of porters and Bangladesh Railway

(BR) employees. The train that is scheduled to arrive in Sylhet at 9:20 am, is regularly delayed by eight to 10 hours.

During peak season more than 63,000 kilograms of hilsa is sent to greater Sylhet region from Chandpur every day. From Chandpur the train with two extra vans loaded with hilsa leaves for Lakhsham junction at 5-30 pm every day and arrives in Lakhsham at 11:40 pm. The problem starts with the connecting Jalalabad Express from Chittagong that tows the extra

hilsa vans from Chandpur to Sylhet. The Jalalabad Express is 'forcibly delayed' at every stop to facilitate a section of black marketeers and unscrupulous traders, traders alleged. BR sources in Sylhet said that within the last 10 years Jalalabad Express has never made it to its destination on schedule due to the presence of these 'gangs'.

"Musclemen in connivance with BR officials at different stations on the way control the schedule of each train, these gangs decide when to allow the train leave stations," said a

retired BR official requesting anonymity.

Traders in Chandpur also said the regular delay in train schedules deprives the people of the greater Sylhet of fresh fish as the hilsa start rotting in the summer heat.

Babul Chokdar, joint secretary of the 210-member fish traders association in Chandpur said that demand for hilsa in Sylhet region is high and bulk of the supply to the region goes from Chandpur. He said since the wholesale market of hilsa fish in Chandpur is situated on BR property, the BR authorities do not allow the traders to opt for other means of transport.

"The BR does not allow any trucks or vehicles to enter its premises, so we are forced to use BR to transport our goods," Chokdar said.

He said traditionally hilsa from Chandpur is always transported by train and all hilsa wholesale markets in Sylhet region are situated along the railway stations. But rapid deterioration in BR services has put the future of hilsa trade in jeopardy.

BR's Assistant Chief Operative Superintendent, Firoz Iftakhar said that after complaints from traders they have strengthened monitoring of train schedules. The pressure on Jalalabad Express increased manifold after a local train service from Chittagong to Sylhet was suspended recently, he added.

"We are trying to reintroduce the local train service from Chittagong to Sylhet to relieve pressure on Jalalabad Express," he said.



Chittagong city yesterday experienced heavy rain as a fallout of depression.

PHOTO: STAR



River port faces erosion due to faulty plan

MOKELSUR RAHMAN LITON, Kishoreganj

Chamra river port in Karimganj, used by people of haor areas of Kishoreganj, Sylhet, Sunamganj, Habiganj, Netrokona and Sherpur districts, is threatened with erosion as vessels use its approach road instead of the port due to faulty design.

All installations at the port are under the control of some ruling party men, locals alleged.

The ruling party men grabbed port lands, constructed about 80 shops and a fish market and realise rent from those. They also use a godown, office building and passenger shed of the port, locals alleged.

The river port was constructed on 1.26 acres of land at a cost of Tk. 1.7 crore. All the installations including two ramps, one godown, pas-

senger shed, office building and internal road were handed it over to Karimganj upazila administration and now they supervise and maintain the port and collect toll from users and water transports, Abu Yusuf, Assistant Engineer of Kishoreganj Local Government and Engineering Department said.

In 1993 the then water transport minister in a public meeting at chamra river port declared that chamra river port would be constructed at a cost of Tk. 40 crore as it was the gate way to haor areas of at least districts.

Dulal Miah, who runs a hotel in the port compound, said that he pays Tk 5000 as annual rental to the ruling party men. Another shopkeeper Nurunnabi said he also pays Tk. 5000.

During a visit to the river port, over 100 vessels were seen

anchored at the approach road cum dam, causing erosion of the road as the concrete slabs are displaced or removed.

If the approach road is damaged, Chamra river port will be affected, LGED sources said.

Chowdhury Kamrul Hasan, Principal of Ilna college in haor area, said every day thousands of people from haor areas of six districts use the river port but it is risky for the users as there is no harbour.

Vessel operators said they can not use the port in monsoon due to flaw in the construction.

This correspondent saw some locals removing concrete slabs from the dam, making it vulnerable to erosion.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) K M Ruhul Amin said, he will take steps to stop the illegal activities and protect the embankment.

Vote for ruling coalition again, urges Tarique

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

Senior joint secretary general of the ruling BNP, Tarique Rahman, has called upon the people to take the right decision in the coming general election and to give their verdict in favour of the ruling coalition.

Rahman addressed a series of public meetings in the district yesterday.

In all the meetings, Rahman said that there are now two types of politics in the country. They are constructive and pro-development and destructive and pro-hartal politics.

He said, opposition parties led by AL are pursuing politics of destruction and lawlessness while the ruling parties are pursuing the politics of development, peace and progress.

He assured the people that if voted to power, BNP will extend the stipend for girls upto degree level and arrange their free education, enhance subsidy for agri-sector and supply fertiliser and seeds free of cost to the poor farmers.

TK 500 CR CHAR JIBIKAYAN PROJECT 20,000 of 18 Teesta shoals deprived of benefits

EAM ASADUZAMAN, Nilphamari

Hundreds of people of Teesta shoal in Dimla upazila yesterday brought out a procession here protesting non-inclusion of the district in an ambitious Tk 500 crore 'Char Jibikayan Project' (livelihood project for shoal people) even after one and a half years of its launching by the government.

Processionists paraded different streets in the town and held a meeting on the Shahid Minar premises. Shahidul Islam chaired the meeting.

Speakers said 20,000 poor people of 18 big and small shoals were deprived of benefits of the project aimed at improving their lives. They threatened a greater agitation if their demand was not met within a short period.

The major activities of the DFID (UK)-funded project are income generating activities and vocational training, ensuring social security, development of road link for agriculture and marketing of agri-products, healthcare and supply of safe water.

The project areas included shoals of 149 unions in 28 upazilas of Bogra, Sirajganj, Gaibandha, Kurigram and Jamalpur districts where flood is a regular feature. But unfortunately, the project did not cover over 20,000 ultra-poor people of the Teesta shoals in

Nilphamari where flood is a part of their life. Monga (a famine-like situation) is also common in the area.

This has created resentment among people in the district.

Of the 18 shoals, Char Kharbari, East Kharbari, Ekotar Char, Fakroter Char, Chhatenana, Vendabari, Baish Pukur and Jhar Sinhes of five unions in Dimla upazila are big shoals while Gopal Jhar, Char Vorot, Ahsian Char are small in two unions of Jaladhaka upazila.

People living in the shoals are deprived of all facilities of modern living. Even the NGO activists do not go there thinking the people are so poor that they would not be able to repay loans if granted.

Death in diseases due to intake of unwholesome food is common. There is no facilities for supply of pure drinking water or sanitation. Those shoals are isolated from the main land as there is no means for communication except boats for communication during rainy season.

While talking to this correspondent, Krishok League district unit general secretary Khoka Ram Roy expressed his dismay at exclusion of the shoal people. 'It would be unwise if the government did not reconsider the issue,' he said.

Nilphamari district unit secretary of Jatiyatabadi Krishok Dal Farhanul Islam said the sufferings and deprivation of the people of the

Teesta shoal is known to all in the area. He urged the government to include Nilphamari district in the project.

Nilphamari unit president of the Communist Party, Sridam Das alleged that non-inclusion of people of the Teesta shoal in the project proves indifference of the government towards poor people in the district.

Former Chairman of Khalisa Chapani union in Dimla Upazila, Moinal Islam said the ongoing agitation will be intensified in the coming days if Nilphamari is not included in the project.

On contact, Dimla Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mezbahul Alam said that he would try to draw the attention of the concerned authority in this connection.

2 die, 2 missing in Sunamganj boat capsized

BSS, Sunamganj

Two persons died and two others remained missing when a boat capsized in Matian Haor under Taherpur upazila of the district Monday evening, police and local sources said.

The boat with 22 passengers sank in the haor water body at about 5:30 pm after it was caught by a heavy storm.

The victims were going to join a wedding function at Sreepur village under Taherpur upazila, the sources said.

Immediately after the accident, villagers rescued 18 persons when they cried for help.

The bodies of two passengers Sita Rani Pal, 20, and Renu Bala Pal, 16, of Gobindanagar village under Biswambhar upazila in Sunamganj were recovered from the haor yesterday afternoon.

But two persons Nantu Das, 23, and Rita Das, 11, of the same village were still missing.

PATHOLOGICAL LABS IN COX'S BAZAR 25 out of 30 have no licence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Owners of unauthorised pathological laboratories and diagnostic centres here are doing a brisk business at the cost of patients for the last few years.

Because of wrong diagnosis by the centres, the patients are getting wrong treatment. At times it leads to their death but the authorities are indifferent to sufferings of the victims.

According to sources in the Civil Surgeon (CS) office, 25 out of 30 pathological laboratories operating in the district have no licence. They are ill-equipped and depriving the government of revenue. Fourteen of the 30 centers are situated in Sadar upazila.

Only five centers operating with

license are Fuad Al Khatib Hospital, Sea Shaikat Hospital, Severon, Jum Jum Hospital and Modern Diagnostic Centre, official sources said.

Owners of the illegal pathological centres are doing business allegedly in connivance with a section of dishonest health officials and doctors working at government hospitals, sources on condition of anonymity said.

Patients are often lured away from government hospitals promising better treatment, allegedly with the help of dishonest health officials and their agents.

Most of the people working as 'technicians' at the illegal pathological centres have no training and

requisite qualification. In most of the diagnostic centres, health assistants perform tests and diagnose diseases. Sometimes their wrong diagnosis threaten lives of patients prove to be incorrect, sources said.

As per law, a pathologist must have a diploma from a recognised institution and must have to undergo three years' training before working as a technician in a pathological laboratory, CS office sources said.

On contact, the CS said a three-member team headed by a medical officer has been formed to look into the allegations.

'We have, meantime, served notices on the owners of the diagnostic centres to apply for licence,' he said.

Extortionists demand toll over phone

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Panic gripped the townspeople as unidentified telephone callers are demanding illegal toll in name of Janajuddha and Purbo Banglar Communist Party.

Three people received threats on Monday. They are managers of Pubali Bank and Karmasangsthan Bank and a retired headmaster of a high school.

Policemen were posted at the residence of an NGO executive on Sunday who received similar threat earlier.

On contact, Nilphamari superintendent of police (SP) Shoeb Ahmed said he asked the Special Branch (SB) for detecting the telephone numbers.

AUG 17 BOMBINGS 6 JMB men in Feni jailed for life

UNB, Feni

A court here on Monday sentenced six members of the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) for life for the August 17 bombings in the district.

The convicts are Mahfuz Khandaker alias Faruk, 22, son of Abur Rashid, Kamal Hossain Duke, 23, son of Zakir Hossain and Mashur Rahman, 25, son of Mizanur Rahman of Chandpur, Redwan Haq, 24, son of Moulana Mostafa of Pirojpur, Shamim Hossain, 25, son of Tamizuddin of Satkhira and Rafiqul Islam, 26, of

Narayanganj. According to the prosecution, the JMB militants, led by its leader Shamim Ahmed, now in jail, simultaneously set off bombs in front of the pourasava chairman office, near a mosque and a high school on August 17 last year.

Police arrested the JMB men, including Shamim, after Sadar thana SI Ashiquzzaman filed a case against them.

After examining the records and witnesses, District and Sessions Judge M Nazrul Islam found them guilty of exploding bombs and handed down the verdict.

Goods train hits truck in Mirzapur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Train communication on the Dhaka-North Bengal route came to a halt for four hours as a train hit a truck at Dherua rail crossing in Mirzapur yesterday.

Police said the accident occurred when a Chittagong-bound goods train coming from Parbatipur hit a Dhaka-bound loaded truck at around 4:30 am leaving the train

driver seriously injured.

Highway police rescued train driver Faizar Rahman, 52, and rushed him to Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital for treatment.

The truck was badly damaged in the accident.

Later, train movement was restored at around 8:30am when a rescue train from Dhaka rushed to the spot and cleared the railway track.

HARTAL IN DISTRICTS

Opposition parties observed a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal yesterday protesting death of a worker in clash with police in the capital on Monday. (Clockwise from L top): A desolate rail gate area in Rajshahi city, main DB Road in Gaibandha, Swechasebok League's procession in Cox's Bazar, 14-party procession in Sylhet and Chittagong Mayor holding rally in the city braving rain.

PHOTO: STAR

