



Expectations belied?

Child rights week began yesterday as the current session of parliament came to an end. But as this child looks expectantly at the imposing Sangsad Bhavan, she may well wonder whether the politicians inside the House are at all concerned about her right to education, health and development.

Star photo by Zahedul I Khan

Train crash leaves 108 dead in India

KHANNA, India, Nov 26: An express train slammed into another passenger train that had vaulted off its tracks Thursday in northwestern India, killing at least 108 people and injuring 250 others, police and railroad officials said.

Three rear cars of the Amritsar-bound Frontier Mail from New Delhi jumped the tracks between the towns of Khanna and Payal in the wheat growing district of Punjab. Barely a minute later, the Calcutta-bound Sealdah Express coming from Jammu on a parallel track collided with the derailed cars, said Ashok Kumar, a top official of the government-owned railroad company.

In all, 16 cars were damaged in the accident, the worst in three years in India. It occurred in darkness at 3:35 am (2200 GMT Wednesday). Kumar told reporters at the accident site, 250 kilometres (150 miles) northwest of New Delhi.

The engine and four cars of the express train were crumpled like balls of paper in the impact.

Rescue workers cut the cars with acetylene torches to extricate 97 bodies, said Punjab state police chief Pooran Chand Dogra. Among the dead were 40 army soldiers going home to Calcutta.

Kumar said the links snapped in the Frontier Mail and some of the rear cars derailed. A total of 1,700 passen-

gers were aboard both trains. Dogra said more bodies were still lying in the cars. Authorities have called for more gas cutters, cranes and other equipment.

The engine of the express train was buried under dirt. Two of its mangled cars were perched on the wreckage of three Front Mail coaches.

Workers took 250 people to local government and private hospitals, where the condition of 36 people was serious, said S K Mirza, an officer at the state police control room.

Residents of the wheat, wholesale market town of Khanna organised the first rescue effort, barely an hour after the accident.

Farmers shone headlights of cars or tractors on the wreckage. Others offered tea, bread or blankets and sweaters since many passengers were dressed in night clothes or had lost their belongings, said Shiv Kumar, a businessman who joined the rescue efforts.

Private pharmacies donated medicines to help the small government hospitals that were overwhelmed with victims and ran out of supplies. The government prepared to bring in more doctors from the state capital, Chandigarh.

Police cars drove through the towns and villages in the region, urging people to help the rescue and to identify relatives who may have been among the

victims. Hours after the accident, many people were still trapped inside the cars.

"They are shrieking. Some are saying, 'Cut off my legs. Cut off my hands. Just rescue me.' I saw one woman who is still trapped inside. Her legs are dangling from the compartment, but they are not able to rescue her because the compartment is at the bottom."

Police rigged up loudspeakers to frequently announce that help was on the way. Others were shouting words of encouragement to those trapped inside.

Five hours after the accident, rescue workers gingerly lifted two army soldiers to waiting ambulances after engineers using crow bars or their bare hands slowly yanked apart the metal wreckage of the Frontier Mail.

"It was a major engineering problem," said V K Agnihotri, the chief railroad engineer supervising the operation. "We couldn't use gas cutters because people were trapped in the coach below."

First information about the accident reached a railroad watchman after a passenger ran a few kilometres (miles) on the tracks along the fields to call for help.

Traffic along the northern routes in Punjab was suspended to facilitate the rescue operations and the removal of wreckage.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Govt to investigate migrants' death

The government is seriously looking into the reported deaths of 29 Bangladesh nationals in Yugoslavia while travelling illegally early this month.

The foreign ministry is investigating the matter, Foreign Secretary Mustafizur Rahman told BSS yesterday. "We have not been able to confirm the deaths."

Press reports said the 29 went to Russia on way to Italy via Hungary and Yugoslavia in a lorry.

The hapless youths concealed themselves in a compartment of the lorry devoid of ventilation, the reports said. When the lorry reached Yugoslavia, the driver opened the compartment, and found the fortune seekers dead due to suffocation, the reports said. Their bodies are lying in state mortuary in Hungary.

Rahman said Bangladesh envoy in Poland inquired with Budapest authorities which could not confirm the incident.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka mission in Moscow has been asked to probe into the matter.

Hartal: Whose democratic right?

Election is fair if I win it, hartal is good if I call it

By Mahfuz Anam

The recent unilateral and unconditional declaration by the Prime Minister that she and her party will never call hartal again, even when the Awami League is in the opposition, has generated a tremendous sigh of relief among the people. The most frequent caller of hartal, the most unconscionable user, or better still abuser, of this political weapon of the masses has finally renounced it -- and that also forever. We congratulate her for this bold and patriotic decision.

This newspaper and this writer have particular reasons to be extremely gratified at this outcome. We have been a relentless and most vocal opponent of

this abuse of people power for partisan and personal ends. During Sheikh Hasina's pre-'96 hartal days, we are on record of having opposed each of her hartals. And from the time Khaleda Zia started calling hartals we have opposed them just as vig-

over as hartals. The finance minister's figure that hartal costs us Tk. 394 crore a day should wake us up to the extremely destructive impact of this luxury we so casually indulge in.

(One can only wish that Mr. Kibria and his party paid as much attention to similar figures produced during their opposition days as he wants the opposition to pay to his figures now).

The world today considers very little else other than the economy in judging a country or its people. The wars in today's world are 'economic wars'.

See page 6

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

Our arguments have been mainly two, both simple and straightforward. One, that a multi-party democratic political system that includes a periodically elected government through free and fair election and a sovereign parliament DID

much a part of a competitive world to indulge in the luxury of incapacitating the whole society for days on end. In fact only a society bent on self destruction can go in for the Bangladesh variety of general strikes, now known the world

Hasina reiterates call for end to hartal

By Special Correspondent

The autumn session of parliament that began on November 5 was prorogued yesterday with a call from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for united efforts to achieve economic emancipation of the people so that Bangladeshis could stand with their heads high in the world.

"We shed blood to achieve independence with the hope of leading a decent life, having two square meals a day under a shelter. That was the dream of the father of the nation, which was not allowed to be fulfilled. Come let us make it a 'Sonar Bangla' again," she said in an hour-long speech.

She was replying to Deputy

Leader of the Opposition Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury who called for looking ahead instead of suffering from "deliriums", being tolerant of the opposition and ending repression.

Reiterating her 'no hartal' offer, Sheikh Hasina urged the opposition to shun the path of hartals and violence. "Instead", she said, "you have faith on people and co-operate in achieving the economic freedom and help alleviate poverty."

Before Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid read out the Presidential order at 10:21 p.m. ending session, Sheikh Hasina told the opposition that she was not ready to "provide the quorum to

listen to opposition abuses when they would have only three members present. Come with 60 members and we would listen to you," she said.

Urging the opposition not to play "truant" but to help make parliament more effective, she pointed to the vacant opposition benches where she found 14 members from BNP. "I hoped that the leader of the opposition would be here tonight to speak and then I would reply."

The prime minister said that during the current session the leader of the opposition had been present only twice, once only for five minutes.

Earlier, she listed various achievements of her govern-

ment in handling the floods, managing the post-flood situation, taking up a massive programme to feed two crore people and reviving the economy for which the government had to levy Tk 300 crore in new taxes to support projects worth thousands of crore taka.

Instead of being a helping hand, the opposition tried to zap the post-flood rehabilitation programme with hartals and violence, she said. They even made a vow to resort to "relentless hartal until the Keyamat (Doomsday)", she added.

Brushing aside opposition charges following her no-hartal call, she said the hartals she

See Page 11

Pakistan to sell power to India

ISLAMABAD, Nov 26: Pakistan agreed in principle to sell 2,000 megawatts of surplus electricity to neighbouring India, officials said after a two-day bilateral meeting that ended here today, reports AFP.

Technical and commercial details will be finalised at another meeting expected to be held in New Delhi next month between senior officials from the power ministries of the two countries, they said.

The deal will mark a step forward toward improving bilateral relations, a Pakistani power ministry official said.

The electricity talks were attended by senior officials and experts of the two countries.

Pakistan and India are also considering a cross-border bus service, which will be discussed here in December.

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