

Militant threats reduce train passengers in Western Zone

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Bomb attacks by Islamist militants in different areas of the country and their threats to blow up trains and railway installations have reduced passengers in Bangladesh Railway's Western Zone.

Arrest of a JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh) suspect at Chuadanga station on December 20 and two others on December 9 and December 14 from two trains have panicked people away from availing train journey, Railway sources said. JMB suspect Ambia Khatun was arrested from Mohananda Express at Syedpur on December 9 and Iqbal Hossain from Rocket Mail at parbatipur on December 14.

JMB in a telephone call to Saidpur Railway Hospital and in a letter sent to the principal of Saidpur College recently threatened to blow up trains and impor-

tant railway installations.

Sources at Saidpur railway station said over 30,000 people used to avail trains from the station. The number has declined by about 40 per cent in about a month. Same is the situation with Parbatipur, one of the biggest railway stations in the country.

Station Master of Nilphamari railway station Md Abdullah said over 8,000 passengers availed trains from the station in November. The number came down to around 3,000 in the first 20 days of December, he said.

A high level source at BR's Western Zone Divisional Headquarter at Pakshi told this correspondent over phone that the number of passengers declined sharply in the first fortnight of December from that in the corresponding period in November.

When contacted over cell phone, Western Zone Divisional

Railway Manager ANM Khasru however claimed that there has not been a substantial decrease in the number of passengers. "There is ups and downs (in the number of passengers)", he said.

Railway sources said 85 trains including inter-city, mail and local trains run in the 109 routes in Western Zone of BR. Mail trains running on different routes are Ekota Express, Teesta Express, Shimanto Express, Rupsha Express, Borendra Express, Titumir Express, Sunderban Express, Druto Jan, Silk City, Lalmoni Express and Karotoa Express. Dinajpur--Dhaka, Saidpur--Khulna, Nilphamari--Rajshahi, Rajshahi--Dhaka, Lalmonirhat--Dhaka are some of the important routes in the Western Zone. Besides, there are some local trains.

Millions of people travel in these

trains every month. Apprehension of bomb attack has reduced the number in last one month, the sources said.

GRP sources said there are 12 railway thanas and 17 outposts covering the 22 districts in BR's Western Zone. But these are not properly manned and well equipped. There are only 12 search teams of police, which is too inadequate to the requirement.

Security men do not have any metal detector in important stations like Iswardi, Bogra, Joypurhat, Lalmonirhat, Shantahar and Nilphamari to check passengers.

To meet security needs, Saidpur Police Superintendent recently sent an emergency message to Dhaka seeking additional police and equipment. He is yet to get any response. Saidpur is the headquarters of railway police in western zone.

RUNNER EDITOR MURDER

Supplementary charge sheet filed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

CID ASP Moula Baksh has submitted a supplementary charge sheet in Daily Runner Editor RM Saiful Alam Mukul murder case, accusing two more persons -- Staff Reporter of Dhaka-based daily Ittefaq Faraj Azmol Hossain and one Panna of Bijpara area in the town.

Earlier 22 people including Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam were chargesheeted by the former Investigation Officer, CID ASP Dulaluddin Akand, on April 24, 1999. Tariqul Islam was ---- by the High Court.

Complainant of the case Hafiza Akhtar Shirin, widow of Saiful Alam Mukul, disagreed with the first chargesheet and submitted a 'Naraji' petition with the trial court.

The trial court rejected the 'Naraji' petition. Then she submitted another Naraji petition with the Judge Court, which also rejected it.

Hafiz Akhtar Shirin then filed the 'Naraji' petition with the High Court, which also rejected it. She then went to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, which ordered re-investigation into the murder case.



Guests birds in Chalan Beel in Sirajganj.

PHOTO: GOLAM MUSTAFA



Shilpacharya's birthday today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The 91st birth anniversary of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin will be celebrated here today.

Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Sangrahashala (gallery) has chalked out a two-day programme to mark the day.

More than 200 children are expected to participate at an art competition today, according to sources in the Sangrahashala. Eminent artist Amirul Islam will inaugurate the competition at 3pm.

A discussion on 'Life and Works of Shilpacharya' will be held at the hall room of the gallery on December 29. It will be presided by the Deputy Keeper of the Sangrahashala, Dr Bijoy Krishna Banik while it will be attended by Mymensingh Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shah Alam Bakshi as chief guest.

The Superintendent of Police (SP) of Mymensingh, Abdullahel Baki, Birishiri Tribal Cultural Academy (Netrakona) Director Poet Mosharraf Karim and writer and columnist Salim Hasan will be present as special guests.

The chief guest will distribute prizes among the winners of art competition.

This will be followed by a cultural function.

Dr Bijoy Krishna told this correspondent all preparations have been taken on the occasion.

Shamsur Rahman, Manik Shah get Ahmedul Kabir Gold Medal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

The Ahmedul Kabir Memorial Gold Medal has been awarded to two slain journalists--Shamsur Rahman of Jessore and Manik Saha of Khulna.

Barrister Nihad Kabir, daughter of noted journalist Ahmedul Kabir distributed the awards at a simple ceremony at Keshabpur on Saturday. The selection was made by Ahmedul Kabir Memorial Medal Committee. Ahmedul Kabir was the Chief Editor of daily Sangbad, published from Dhaka.

Selina Akhter Lucky, widow of Shamsur Rahman received the award on behalf of her late husband. Manik Shah's widow did not turn up to receive award.

UPDF founding anniversary observed

A CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

The 7th founding anniversary of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) was observed here and different parts of the district yesterday.

On this day in 1997, the UPDF was formed aiming at self-rule of Zummah (indigenous) people. Prasit Bikash Khisha became the chief of the party at its very inception.

Various programmes were chalked out to mark the day. The programmes included hoisting of national and party flags and discussion.

3 JMB cadres held in Bhomra, Khulna

Arrestee in Khulna is suicide squad member, police say

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Three JMB suspects were arrested from Satkhira and Daulatpur in Khulna district yesterday and the night before.

Our Satkhira Correspondent reported that police arrested two JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh) activists from Bhomra check post in the Sadar upazila yesterday.

They are Ershad Hossain, 22, son of Shawkat Moral and Ebadul, 24, son of Abdul Jabbar of village Magri in Kaligonj upazila.

Police said that during interrogation they said they are JMB members.

On contact, Officer-in-Charge of Bhomra Immigration thana Mafidul Islam said, the two were arrested while they were going to India. A case was filed with the

Sadar thana.

Our Staff Correspondent in Khulna reported that members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), acting on a tip-off, arrested a cadre of outlawed JMB from near Daulatpur Government BL College Saturday night.

The arrestee is Habibur Rahman alias Ismail, 22, son of Md Mujibar Rahman of Char Charhshi village in Jamalpur Sadar upazila, said a press release issued by Rab yesterday.

According to RAB, Ismail is an 'Ehsar' of JMB. He was handed over to Daulatpur police.

According to Daulatpur thana source, Ismail may be a suicide bomber as he is an Ehsar. He will be taken on remand for questioning why he came from Jamalpur and staying in Khulna city.

Disabled demand soft bank loan

Action on Disability and Development holds annual meet in Rajshahi

RU CORRESPONDENT

Physically retarded men and women have demanded loan on easy terms from all public and private sector banks for their self-employment.

The demand was made at their annual general meeting, held at Action on Disability and Development (ADD) Training Center here yesterday.

Over 100 physically retarded men and women from 15 districts participated in the day-long meeting, organised by the Jatya Trinomul Protibandhi Federation.

Their leader Kulsum Ranjan in her speech alleged that banks neglect retarded persons when they go for loan for any productive activity.

Rajshahi Sonali Bank General Manager Khatib Nazrul Islam was present as chief guest while ADD Country Representative Mosharraf Hossain was the main speaker.

Physically retarded Firoza Akter told the conference that in addition to soft loans, disabled people should be given micro credit for small business

ventures.

"We can also participate in nation building activities if we are given soft bank loan and support", she said.

Khatib Nazrul Islam told the meeting that he would take all necessary steps soon to give soft loan to physically retarded people from his bank. "Order will be issued soon".

Other speakers sought cooperation from all sections of people in society for development of physically retarded people in the country.

They said there should be a change in the attitude that disabled people are not liabilities in society. They can be turned into a productive force if trained and given support, they said.

The meeting was addressed by, among others, human rights activist Ayes Uddin Ahmed, Akter Hossain, Habibur Rahman and some journalists.

The meeting reviewed activities of the ADD in last one year and approved its budget and programmes for 2006.



PHOTO: STAR

A pre-primary school in Alaipur in Kalaroa upazila, run by SUS, a local NGO.

Move for good primary education in Satkhira

NGO launches programme in 3 upazilas

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A laudable program has been launched by a local NGO--Satkhira Unnayan Sangstha (SUS)--in three upazilas of Satkhira to improve quality of primary education and ensure 100 per cent enrolment of children in schools.

The program is participatory and pro-poor. The five-year plan in Kalaroa, Assassuni and Sadar upazilas is financed by an international NGO--Stroam Foundation of Norway to promote quality primary education and ensure primary education for all by 2010.

The programme followed a survey done by SUS in the three upazilas to identify hindrances to quality primary education.

The survey revealed that 55.84 per cent of the students are irregular with a dropout of 20.7 per cent, 32 per cent complete primary education without any knowledge about arithmetic and 6.2 per cent of children in the areas are out of schooling.

Poverty, lack of awareness among guardians and inadequate trained teachers at schools are the main reasons, the survey revealed.

To address the problems, SUS arranged group meetings with guardians and school managing committees to create awareness about the need for good primary education. It also trained teachers so that they can impart good education.

The NGO also appointed 32 'community teachers' in 14 gov-

ernment primary schools where primary education had been facing set back due to lack of teachers.

It has set up six pre-primary schools in the three upazilas where children above 5 play, have fun, and learn reading and writing, manners and cleanliness.

The approach has yielded positive results as children are now attracted to schools and their guardians are also aware. The enrolment will reach 100 per cent soon and the dropout rate will decrease, officials of the NGO and some guardians said while talking to this correspondent on Saturday

AL activist killed in Pabna

A CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A union level Awami League (AL) activist was killed by armed miscreants in a crowded bazaar in Akdanta union of Algoria upazila Sunday morning, police and eyewitnesses said.

They said Abdul Berek, 31, son of Abdur Rahim of Mougram village in Akdanta union was killed by a gang of about 12 unidentified killers at a tea stall at about 10:30 am. They chopped him indiscriminately and shot him to death on the spot.

After the incident, local traders closed shutters of their shops turning the bazaar desolate as most of the people ran away for safety from the bazaar.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Pabna General Hospital for autopsy. Police apprehended that Berek might have been killed over supremacy in the area.

Additional police forces have been deployed in the area.

Biman resumes Dhaka-Barisal flight Jan 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Biman Bangladesh Airlines will resume its Dhaka-Barisal flights from January 1. However instead of direct Dhaka-Barisal-Dhaka flights earlier, Barisal will be connected with Dhaka via Jessore in the new arrangement, which will double the travelling time. This will reduce the number of passengers, sources said. Biman sources at its Barisal office said there will be two flights a week on Sunday and Thursday in the new schedule, which will benefit Benapole bound passengers.

Biman will leave Dhaka for Barisal at 12-15 pm on Sunday and land at Barisal at 12-40 pm. It will fly for Jessore at 1-05. It will reach Jessore at 1-30 pm and leave for Dhaka at 2-00 pm. It will land in Dhaka at 2-30 pm.

On Thursday Biman will leave Dhaka for Jessore at 12-15 pm and arrive Barisal at 1-15 pm.

Biman's barisal Station Manager Shamsul Arefin however claimed that there will be enough passengers in the new schedule as India-bound passengers through Benapole will avail the flights.

FERTILISER CRISIS

IRRI-Boro farming in Nilphamari faces setback

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Farmers in the district are facing a problem in cultivation of IRRI-Boro paddy at the very beginning of the season due to artificial crisis of chemical fertiliser.

According to sources in the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), 73,000 hectares have been targeted in the entire district for IRRI-Boro cultivation.

Sources close to dealers said there is a huge stock of fertiliser with importers at Noapara in Jessore, Nagarbari in Pabna and Chittagong and Narayanganj. But they are not selling

fertiliser to dealers because of non-payment of subsidised money by the government.

At present, each bag containing 50 kilogram imported TSP is being sold at between Tk 800 to 950 while last year its subsidised rate was at between Tk 675 to 715.

Each bag of imported Di-amonium phosphate (DAP) is now on sale at between Tk 1,100 to 1,250 which was sold at between Tk 790 to 820 (subsidised rate) previous year.

Presently, each bag of murate of potash is being sold at between Tk 800 to 875 which was sold at between Tk 575 to 600 (subsidised rate) last year.

The sources revealed that the

stock of fertiliser would be exhausted within three or four days while the peak season of IRRI-Boro cultivation would start within 15 to 20 days. If the present situation continues, farmers will definitely face a setback in IRRI-Boro cultivation this year, they added.

Nilphamari District Fertiliser Association president Abdul Wahed said if the present crisis is not solved immediately, then fertiliser dealers should be allowed to procure chemical fertiliser from the government buffer stock.

Bid for clean, safe Mymensingh Sustainable Mymensingh Initiative (SMI) launched

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A programme styled Sustainable Mymensingh Initiative (SMI) has been launched to make Mymensingh town a clean and safe place to live in by motivating its people and taking up various programmes.

It was launched at a meeting of leaders and representatives of different walks of life, held at the CANOPY (Community Actions for Nature, Oppressed People and Youth) Training and Resource Centre in the town on Saturday.

Twenty-five 'community leaders' from different sectors attended the meeting with by Mymensingh Municipality Chairman Mahmud Al-Nur Tarek in the chair.

A seven-member working group was formed to run its activities in six sectors. The members are Gouripur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Kazi Anwarul Haque (social justice), environment scientist NS Chowdhary (environment conservation), business leader Manik Dutt (business and economic affairs), journalist Habibur Rahman Sheikh (political affairs), Prof Md. Motaheer Khalid of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) (cultural affairs), Prof Md. Borhan

Uddin of BAU (religious affairs) Fulfillment. Laila Jasmin Banu, Executive Director of CANOPY is its co-ordinator.

Laila told the meeting that SMI would be replication of the Sustainable Kuantan Initiative (SKI), undertaken by the Sustainable Development Network (SUSDEN) in Malaysia, which brought about great changes in community life in that country. SMI is the first such project in Bangladesh, she claimed.

The model was developed by Bishan Singh, Executive Director of Management Institute for Social Change (MINSOC) in Malaysia.

Bishan Singh attended the function as chief guest on invitation.

Speaking on the occasion Singh said the SMI will focus on making the townspeople responsible citizens and to make them aware that each of them has responsibilities towards making the town a clean and safe place to live in.

Municipality Chairman Nur Tarek in his speech assured the working group of his full co-operation in making the effort successful.

The meeting also fixed an action plan for three years.



The seven-member working group of SMI holding its first meeting.

PHOTO: STAR