

PM's return to Dhaka delayed for glitches in chopper

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Bandarban

Technical problems of a helicopter that had been carrying Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia delayed her return to the capital by half an hour.

The PM had to get down from the faulty helicopter 17 minutes after she boarded it. She finally returned to the capital by another helicopter that was carrying journalists.

Bandarban Zila Parishad Chairman Mamaching said the PM returned to Dhaka by another helicopter as the landing gear of the helicopter meant for her broke down.

The faulty helicopter has been kept at the Bandarban cantonment, sources said.

Khaleda Zia arrived at Bandarban around 4:15pm yesterday after visiting Khagrachhari and Rangamati. During her visit to the district, she inaugurated five development projects involving Tk 44 crore.

Railways paralysed to protest reform plan

Thousands stranded at stations as trade unions enforce first strike in Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

Thousands of passengers suffered as railway employees and workers paralysed train services across the country yesterday, enforcing a strike for the first time to protest the government move to restructure Bangladesh Railway.

The striking staff held rallies and staged demonstrations at different railway installations including offices, workshops and stations during the dawn-to-dusk strike, enforced by Railway Sramik Karmachari Sangram Parishad (RSKSP).

They also drove away officials and staff from their offices and locked those at different places in the country. Manhandling of officials by stranded train passengers were also reported.

Railway sources said turning the railway into a corporate entity is part

of the Tk 3,500 crore Railway Improvement Project approved by the Ecneec (Executive Committee of the National Economic Council) recently. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is to provide most of the funds for the project, and the government is going to sign a deal with the ADB today.

The RSKSP in a press release yesterday said it went for the strike following failure of the talks with the Communications Minister Nazmul Huda on October 9 and 10.

Reports received in Dhaka said the station master's office at Fouzdarhat was set ablaze during the strike. Station Manager Abdus Salam of Kumira railway station in Sitakunda upazila was manhandled by agitated passengers of an Akhaura-bound train that got stuck due to the strike.

Our Chittagong office reports: Railway system in the port city came

to a standstill due to the strike. No trains could ply to and from Chittagong, and activities remained suspended also at the Central Railway Building (CRB), headquarters of the railway's eastern zone.

The demonstrating workers and employees put up barricades in front of the CRB and prevented other staff from performing their duties.

Three Chittagong-bound trains got stuck at different spots in Dhaka-Chittagong route with the passengers suffering badly.

Chittagong-bound trains Turna Nishitha and Dhaka Mail from Dhaka got stuck at Bhatari and Sitakunda stations, and Udayan Express from Sylhet at Barabkunda station.

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A man relaxes at an empty train compartment during yesterday's daylong strike by the railway employees that was enforced to protest the move to privatise Bangladesh Railway. The photo was taken from Chittagong station.



Move on to talk Hasan out of interim govt job

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A secret move is underway to break the political deadlock by convincing Justice KM Hasan not to accept the post of chief adviser to the next caretaker government "for greater interest of the nation".

But Justice Hasan maintained silence over the requests made by different quarters as part of the secret move, sources close to those who initiated the move said.

The sources said a few well-known persons from the country's political and cultural arena are maintaining close relations with ruling BNP and main opposition Awami League (AL) about the developments of their move.

They have planned to engage more eminent personalities to convince Justice Hasan to feel "embarrassed" to accept the post of caretaker government chief to avoid political crisis ahead of the next parliamentary elections, sources added.

Whatever result comes out from the ongoing BNP-AL dialogue and the secret move, its disclosure is

unlikely before October 28 to maintain a win-win situation for the two camps.

Although the talks between BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil resume on October 16, there is little possibility that any decision will be taken on the vital issue of Justice Hasan in the absence of the chiefs of the two parties and alliances.

Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is scheduled to leave Dhaka for Saudi Arabia on October 14 while AL President Sheikh Hasina leaves the country today for the USA and UK. Both will return after October 20.

Jalil also leaves Dhaka today for Singapore for a medical check-up and is scheduled to return on October 15.

Eid vacation begins after the return of Khaleda and Hasina and after the vacation it will be time to hand over power to the caretaker government.

If everything goes in accordance with the plan, the dialogue may continue a few more days, even

after expiry of the present government's tenure on October 27.

Meantime, the group of eminent persons is determined to convince Justice Hasan to decline to take oath as the chief adviser when the president invites him after October 27, sources said.

The president will then go for the other options in accordance with the constitution to appoint the chief adviser, to which the AL-led 14-party opposition combine has already declared that they have no objection. The BNP-led ruling alliance has also kept claiming that they will not go beyond the constitution.

If Justice Hasan makes his announcement after October 27, the negotiators believe, it will lead to a win-win situation for both the ruling and opposition alliances.

"It will prove that the ruling BNP is not defeated by the opposition while the opposition's demand will also be fulfilled," said a source

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SSB promotes 310 officials 'loyal to BNP, Jamaat'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 310 government officials, 'loyal to the ruling BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami,' were recommended by the Special Selection Board (SSB) for promotion to the posts of deputy secretaries (DS) and secretaries at the fag end of the government's tenure, sources said.

The highest body to recommend promotion of government officials, the SSB made the recommendations at a meeting on Tuesday. Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary Abu Solaiman Chowdhury, it was also the board's last meeting in the present government's regime.

Sources said that the move had been made to ensure quick promotion of two assistant personal secretaries in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

During the two and half hours long meeting, about 300 officials of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) 1986 and 1988 and deprived officials of the 1985 and 1984 batches have been recommended for promotion to deputy secretaries.

In addition, some deputy secretaries and additional secretaries

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BTRC in a hurry to grant VoIP licences

Powerful illegal operators to get licences in absence of common platform

SHARIER KHAN

After sitting idle for nearly three years on licensing internet telephony, Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) is now hurrying award of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) licences without ensuring first a common platform for VoIP operators.

The BTRC received 51 applica-

tions for VoIP licences on October 8. Applicants include 31 Internet Service Providers (ISPs), 14 Public Switched Telephone Networks (PSTNs) and six mobile phone companies.

But without a common platform, powerful illegal VoIP operators who are among these applicants will now easily get BTRC licences, and will not only eat up the market of

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) but also deprive the government of international telecom revenue.

The BTTB's international telephony generates around Tk 400 crore revenue annually. This will drastically slide down to around Tk 150 crore, officials say.

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Chief adviser, EC to be fully neutral

PM tells rally about fair polls

UNB, Rangamati

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday categorically said the would-be chief adviser of the next caretaker government and the incumbent Election Commission (EC) are completely neutral for conducting the forthcoming elections.

"If you (opposition) have confidence in people and democracy, participate in the elections. Win or defeat depends on the verdict of the

electorates—all will have to wait until that time," she told public meetings in Rangamati and Khagrachhari during her tour of the three hill districts.

In an apparent negation of the opposition demand for neutral and non-controversial caretaker chief and election commission, Khaleda said when people are united, one cannot win depending on a particular individual.

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Over 7,000 sued for rioting over RMG pay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ten cases were filed with six police stations in and around the capital against over 7,000 people on charges of vandalising garment factories, shopping complexes, vehicles and assault on police that occurred during the strike on Tuesday called by several readymade garment (RMG) workers' organisations.

Thousands of RMG workers staged violent demonstrations in

Dhaka, Savar and Gazipur on Tuesday, vandalising around 100 RMG units and a number of banks, and looting shopping complexes.

Following the incident, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) threatened to shut down their factories for an indefinite period if the government failed to take stern action within 48 hours against the ones behind the vandalism.

On Tuesday, rampaging workers

also beat up the officer-in-charge (OC) of Uttara Police Station severely and snatched his loaded revolver, walkie-talkie and a cellular phone set.

Uttara police raided several places till 8:00pm last night to recover the items snatched from the OC without any success.

Uttara police said four separate cases -- one by police and three by aggrieved victims -- were filed with them on Tuesday night against

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Tigers crash out of tourney

BISHWAJIT ROY from Jaipur

Bangladesh confirmed their exit from the ICC Champions Trophy in a most embarrassing way when holders West Indies crushed them by ten wickets at the Swai Mansingh Stadium here on Wednesday.

The Tigers went into their second qualifying game needing a victory to stay alive for a berth in the tournament proper. But after an encouraging start with 95-1, they collapsed to 161 all out with more than three overs to spare. The modest total was never going to be threatening on a batting-friendly wicket and the left-handed opening pair of the Caribbean, Chris Gayle and Shivnarine Chanderpaul completed the chase under lights in style.

Gayle smashed a superb 104 while Chanderpaul struck 52 as the West Indies reached the victory

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MADHYAPARA HARD ROCK MINE Trial production starts 12yrs after schedule

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Madhyapara Granite Mining Company Limited (MGMC), a hard rock mining project of Petrobangla, finally entered into trial production yesterday afternoon after missing the original deadline of production 12 years back, according to MGMC sources.

The project is expected to be handed over within the next three months if Namnam -- the company that got the contract of the job -- performs the trial run successfully.

According to the project proposal, Namnam will have to develop five blocks and have to extract at least 6660 metric tons of granite from each block, according to sources.

Sources said rock extraction

from the first block has been stared on October 10. Tentative dates for extraction from the other blocks are as follows -- second block on October 17, third block on October 27, forth block on November 20 and the fifth one on November 27.

After completion of the trial production from all five blocks, Namnam will have to perform a 24-hour test run on December 12 this year. The rock mining will be ready for handover only after this goes successfully, said Asadullah, a mining engineer of the project.

As per the original project profile, the company was to prepare the mine in June 1998 and hand it over to Petrobangla on November the same year. The original project

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2ND MEGHNAGHAT PROJECT Deal may be finally signed today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Power Development Board (PDB) may sign today the Land Lease Agreement (LLA) with Orion-Belhasa and Steag consortium to start implementing the second Meghnaghat 450MW power project.

The Orion-Belhasa-Steg under the banner of Bon Consortium failed to appear on October 3--the deadline set by the PDB for signing the LLA, and the future of the Meghnaghat-2 power project became uncertain.

The consortium has been dodging the LLA signing for the last seven months. The PDB gave it the last deadline on October 3 and warned in case of failure to show up of taking "appropriate measures"--

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PHOTO: STAR

People take the risky course of crossing road through a narrow passage between barbwire just to avoid the 'trouble' of using foot-over bridge. The photo was taken under the over-bridge beside New Market in the capital yesterday.

Babar, IG sued for cop attack on opposition activists

Judicial probe ordered

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered judicial probe after a lawyer filed a criminal case against the state minister for home, inspector general of police (IGP) and 809 other police personnel for attacking the opposition activists during their Election Commission (EC) siege programme on September 6.

Jubo Ainjibi League General Secretary Advocate Nure Alam Uzzal filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court against the accused for their alleged involvement in the attacks.

On the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate ABM Abdul Fattah recorded statement of the

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