

540KM RAIL TRACKS IN 8 NORTHERN DISTRICTS 297 level crossings out of 415 have no gates or gatemen

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A staggering 297 of 415 level crossings on 540 kilometres rail tracks in eight northern districts under Lalmonirhat West Zone Railway Division have remained without gates and gatemen for a long time, exposing commuters and

vehicles to accidents.

Of the 297 risky crossings, 120 are on roads used by heavy vehicles.

Permanent railway staff work as gatemen at only 29 of the 118 'safe' level crossings while semi-skilled locals, recruited on daily-wage basis by the railway authorities,

maintain 89 others, officials said.

Of the 297 unsafe crossings, 44 are in Lalmonirhat district, 35 in Kurigram, 33 in Rangpur, 38 in Bogra, 46 in Dinajpur, 28 in Gaibandha, 37 in Panchagarh and 36 in Thakurgaon district.

Fifty-one trains including

10 intercity, 10 mail and 28 local passenger trains and three goods carrying ones run through these crossings regularly.

Officials of Lalmonirhat railway, however, said at least 111 of those unsafe level crossings are illegal as those were made when the Roads and

Highways Department (RHD), Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Zila Parishad and municipality authorities constructed roads across railway lines without taking permission of the railway authorities.

The authorities concerned of LGED, RHD, Zila Parishad are yet to take necessary steps for these level crossings although they were served with letters on several occasions, said Lalmonirhat West Zone Railway Traffic Superintendent Syed Zahurul Islam.

According to railway law, all the expenditures for setting up gates and recruiting gatemen are responsibilities of the departments that built the roads over the years, he said.

In absence of gates and gatemen at the level crossings, quite a few accidents occurred due to carelessness of pedestrians and drivers recently.

"It is essential to set up gates and recruit gatemen at least for the 120 level crossings on roads as vehicles move through those crossings round the clock," said Lalmonirhat West Zone Railway Divisional Engineer AFM Masudur Rahaman.

"Setting up of gates and recruitment of gatemen have remained stalled due to fund constraint. My office has already send estimated project profile to higher authorities of Bangladesh Railway to set up gates and recruit gatemen for the highly risky 120 level crossings, but we are yet to get any response," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

A tree full of young mangoes at an orchard in Rajshahi, one of the main juicy summer fruit producing districts. Traders and farmers expect bumper mango production this year if favourable weather condition persists.

Schoolboy abducted for ransom in Chuadanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Incidents of abduction are on rise in Meherpur, Chuadanga and Kushtia as four people were abducted in the three districts for ransom in the last two months since January 25.

The latest victim is a schoolboy named Faruq Ahmed, son of Hossain Ali Babu of Belgachi village under Almadanga upazila of Chuadanga district. A gang of criminals kidnapped Faruq, a class nine student of Belgachi High School Monday evening. One of the gang members phoned Faruq's father at around 9:30 demanding Tk 10 lakh ransom for his release. Two hours later, the same gang member again phoned victim's father and asked him to pay Tk 5 lakh.

Faruq's father Hossain Ali said the gang asked him not to file any case in this regard or disclose the matter to journalists.

On March 28, criminals stormed into the house of hotelier Ejaz, 38, son of Sahidul Islam in Meherpur Sadar upazila at around 11:00pm and picked him up at gunpoint.

Later, the abductors told Ejaz's family over cellphone that they abducted him for his failure to pay them Tk 1 lakh. They also demanded Tk 2 lakh for his release.

Ejaz's family filed a general diary (GD) with Meherpur Sadar Police Station on Monday.

In Gangni upazila of the district, a schoolgirl was abducted on February 28. According to police, Nayan, son of Joulush Ali of Jorapukuria village of the upazila, and his accomplices picked up the girl, a class ten student of Jorapukuria High School while she was returning home from the school at around 3:30 pm.

Victim's brother filed a GD with Gangni Police Station the same day, but police could not rescue the girl until yesterday. Her family at a press conference at Gangni press club on Monday alleged that police are not taking necessary steps to rescue the girl.

In Kushtia, Noor Mohammad, 45, a member of Aria Union Parishad (UP) under Daulatpur upazila, was abducted on January 25. Victim's wife Sahinur Khatun at a press conference at Daulatpur press club on Monday said two criminals picked up Noor at gunpoint when he was sitting at a tea stall at Lalnagar Bazar.

Noor's brother Lutfur Rahman filed a case with Daulatpur Police Station on February 9, against six alleged criminals of the area. But police could not arrest the accused or rescue the UP member as of 5:00pm yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

A signboard at a level crossing in Lalmonirhat reads, "This level crossing has no gateman. Pedestrians and vehicles have to cross this point at their own risk. They are also bound to pay compensation in case of any mishap".

SNIPPETS

Transport strike in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Transport owners and workers yesterday jointly enforced a transport strike on all routes of the district for an indefinite period. Rangpur Motor Bus Owners Association and Rangpur Transport Workers Union enforced the strike to press home their 12-point demand including reconstruction of three bus terminals of the town. At a press conference held here on Monday, association secretary Moshir Rahman Ranga and Rangpur Transport Workers' Association secretary Abdul Majid declared that they would continue the strike until their demands are met.

Mud collapse kills two

UNB, Tangail

Two workers were killed in mud collapse while working at a brick field at Sandalpur village in Dhanbari upazila on Monday afternoon. Deceased Abdul Halim, 25, and Nurul Islam alias Chan Mia, 30, hailed from Palbari village in the upazila. Police said a chunk of mud collapsed on the two leaving Halim dead on the spot. Locals rescued Nurul in a critical condition and shifted him to the local health complex where he died in the evening.

Woman jailed for killing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A court here yesterday sentenced a woman to life term rigorous imprisonment (RI) for killing her husband. Convict Monwara was second wife of victim 45-year-old Moshin Ali. The judge of Bogra Additional District and Sessions Judge Court-3 also fined Monwara Tk 20,000. According to the prosecution story, Monwara cut Moshin's penis at dead of night on June 23 in 2006 as he leased out 8 decimal of land against her will for marriage of Morsheda, an offspring of his first wife. Moshin died instantaneously. On investigation, Gabtoli police station sub-inspector (SI) Anwar Hossain submitted a charge sheet on June 31, 2007 against Monwara. Judge Nitai Chandra pronounced the verdict.

Snake kills charmer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A snake charmer died here from snake-bite on Monday night. Victim Naren, 45, hailed from Bakultala village under Bochagonj upazila in Dinajpur district. Naren was playing with a snake at Unatrish Mile bazaar under Thakurgaon Sadar upazila in the afternoon. All of a sudden the snake bite him on his right hand. After a few minutes he fell on the ground. Locals rushed him to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital in a critical condition. There he died without treatment at about 7:30pm as no vaccination was available there.

Extortionist held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

People on Monday night caught red-handed an extortionist with a pipe-gun from Chandanganti village in Belkuchi upazila on Monday night. Extortionist Shah Alam, 24, is son of Monirul Islam of Garamashi village in the same upazila. At that time, Shah Alam was collecting illegal toll from two of his neighbours at gun point with the help of some of his accomplices. Hearing scream of the victims, locals rushed to the spot, chased the culprits and caught Shah Alam red-handed. But his accomplices managed to flee. Locals gave him a good beating and later handed him along with the firearm over to Belkuchi police. A case was also lodged with Belkuchi police station in this connection.

KHDC councillor resigns in face of AL agitation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A councillor of Khagrachhari Hill District Council (KHDC) resigned yesterday in the face of agitation by the ruling party.

Abu Bakar Siddique handed over his resignation to Tarun Kanti Ghosh, chief executive officer of the council, around 4:30 pm. He showed personal problems as reasons for stepping down from his post.

But at KHDC office premises Bakar told reporters that leaders of local Awami League (AL) and its associate bodies wrongly accused three councillors and the chairman of patronising militancy and fuelling recent violence in Khagrachhari.

Terming the allegations false and fabricated he said, they were selected by the non-political caretaker government on July 12, 2007 for their honesty and good personality.

The leaders and workers of eight local bodies of AL on March 26 vowed to "free the district council from BNP and Jamaat" and continue agitation until the chairman and the three councillors are removed from KHDC.

Earlier, Khagrachhari Hill District Council chairman Ruhity Karbari resigned on Monday showing poor health and personal problems.

Local AL leaders said Karbari and the three councillors belonged to BNP-Jamaat alliance and do not cooperate with the government.

Sources said Karbari is the vice president of Mohalchhari upazila unit BNP, councillor Animesh Dewan Nandith is the vice president of Sadar upazila BNP, councillor Sanu Mong Marma is the organising secretary of district Jubo Dal and councillor Abu Bakar Siddique is a member of district unit Jamaat.

Crab catcher survives tiger attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Incredible though, a crab catcher yesterday fought a 15-minute battle with a man-eater and survived the attack in the deep forest of the Sundarbans.

Family sources said, critically injured Sheikh Shafiqul Islam, 35, is now undergoing treatment at Shyamnagar upazila health complex.

Shafiqul, son of Sheikh Shawkat Ali of village Banshipur in the upazila, received serious injuries in head, chest, hands and back.

Sources said, Shafiqul went to the Zahazbari Canal under Burigoalini Forest Range with four other fellows for catching crab on Monday.

As they were catching crab near Dobeki area in the Sundarbans, all of a sudden a man-eater tiger swooped on them.

Shafiqul struggled with the tiger for 15 minutes as four others escaped the scene. At a stage, the tiger abandoned the fight and his four fellow returned to the area and rescued him.

COLLEGE TEACHER MURDER IN SYLHET IO changed, five suspects remanded for three days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Sylhet Kotwali police yesterday took five people, arrested in connection with the killing of college teacher Harun ur Rashid, on remand for three days.

Chief Judicial Magistrate Amir Uddin granted three days' remand as police prayed for seven days after producing them before the judge yesterday.

Rab in a drive Sunday night caught five people including two students of the Government Women's College. The elite force also recovered the mobile phone of the slain teacher from the possession of one of the arrestees.

The five were handed over to the Sylhet Kotwali police Monday evening.

They are Sujina Akhtar Munni, Safia Khatun Lipi, Russel Ahmed and Alimul Islam. Besides, Lokman Miah, manager of a hotel in the city,

was arrested for sheltering the alleged killer in his hotel for seven days without registration. However, the alleged killer, Kawsar, is still at large.

Meanwhile, the investigation officer (IO) of the sensational case has been changed.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Sylhet Kotwali police Mohammad Ali replaced sub-inspector Harun Majumder as new IO yesterday.

A day after the killing, police arrested a JCD man as a suspect followed by two others in the next two days. Although police that time mentioned as killers, they could not establish their claim.

Associate Professor Harun Ur Rashid of the Sylhet Government Women's College was stabbed to death by a gang in the afternoon of March 21 in front of his rented house near Chouhatta. The killing sparked series of protests in the city.

Meanwhile, the family members of two arrestees

yesterday alleged at press conference here that failing to nab the real culprits police arrested the JCD men and tortured them.

Kotwali police tortured Dulal and Umon just after their arrests on March 24 from the city's Kumarpura area, but failed to get any clue to the killing, Dulal's brothers -- Jalal Ahmed and Helal Ahmed and Ataul Gani Umon's brother Osman Gani told reporters at Sylhet Press Club.

Police first caught JCD's Jamal Ahmed from his house in the city's Subidbazar on March 22 and remanded him for four days.

His mother Hosne Ara Begum and brothers also brought serious allegations against the Sylhet kotwali police at a press conference on March 27.

They alleged that police in the past too, implicated Jamal with the killing of SAMS Kibria in 2005 and some other cases but failed to establish any of the charges in the court.



PHOTO: STAR

Once the farmers of the Barind area in Chapainawabganj depended most on these natural canals as main source of water for farming. But most of the canals have now dried up due to lack of rain and re-excavation, forcing them to go for deep tube-wells. However, they cannot use tubewell water at the peak Irri-boro season for frequent power outage.

BCL besieges RU statistics dept

A RU CORRESPONDENT

Leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at Rajshahi University (RU) yesterday laid a siege to the office of the statistics department alleging secret liaison between a section of teachers and Shibir men.

BCL men led by unit president Awal Kabir Joy and secretary Majedul Islam Opu besieged the department office for half an hour till 2:00pm confining the department chairman and other teachers to their rooms.

The BCL men alleged that statistics department teachers Prof Ayub Ali and Prof Kamruzzaman and employees Bodiuzzaman and Saidur Rahman have a secret deal with Bangabandhu Hall unit Shibir secretary Khalid Hossain and Shibir cadre of Shah Mukhdoom Hall unit Msiur Rahman. Both the Shibir cadres are the main accused in BCL worker Faruque Hossain killing case.

They further alleged that the forms for Khalid and Masur for their fourth year final examination were filled up in absence of them at the department by those teachers and employees on March 22.

They also claimed that Masur led the first attack on BCL men at Bangabandhu Hall where Shibir cadres stabbed BCL activist Asad and Kausar on the night of February 8.

He also attacked Faruque Hossain on the early hour of February 9 at Shah Mukhdoom Hall, the BCL leaders said.

The BCL leaders further alleged that Prof Ayub Ali participated in the meeting near Islamia College on February 8 where pro-Jamaat teachers and leaders held a close door meeting with Shibir leaders to plan the February 9 attack.

RU proctor Prof Chowdhury Zakaria yesterday rushed to the statistics department and held a meeting with the department chairman and BCL leaders to settle the matter.

At the meeting, the BCL leaders demanded suspension of the teachers and employees from their official activities.

Prof Anjumanara, chairman of the department, assured the BCL leaders of looking into the matter and taking necessary steps after holding a meeting of the academic committee.