

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Aboard an Eid train;

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Eid Travellers

Another Eid has come and gone leaving its memories behind.

In our family home in Sylhet, Eids of my childhood brought a joyful congregation of relatives from all over. Perhaps that's why I like observing the joys (and sorrows) of Eid travellers at Dhaka's departure points: Kamalapur train station, Tangail bus stand and Sadarghat.

Walking down a platform in Kamalapur, I see a couple looking out a window, laughing loudly. They are watching a group of people climbing to the rooftop of the train across the platform. Many want the free ride, and so a group effort is underway as helpful hands boost each person skywards and others receive them at the top as the crowd cheers claps. Sandals and bags are tossed upwards to join their owners. Alas, two guards come running. "There is room inside the train, you must come down," they shout. "But this is a matter of honour and tradition," I want to tell them. The rooftop crowd, which greatly outnumbers the guards, moans and groans but eventually descends. The good cheer and laughter remain.

As I walk away, I overhear two white-coated railway officials. "What a crowd! Weren't we getting an extra security contingent for Eid?" asks one. The other laughs: "Don't you know they have gone home for Eid before everyone else?"

Minutes later, another commotion: two portly burka-clad women have caught a shirtless young man trying to steal their money. After some heated words, they put their arms around his skinny torso and start dragging him. Everyone has already seen him, so his

best recourse to avoid a public beating is silent cooperation. They lead him back to the station, presumably into the hands of law enforcement.

The Tangail bus stand, near Mohakhali, has thinner crowds today, because of dilapidated highways and fewer buses. Thus, there is more order: passengers queue up in long lines for their buses. The glum faces of waiting children brighten the instant they board. The dearth of toys in their hands surprises me. Do people have less spending money, or has the parental mobile phone replaced yesteryear's fluorescent yellow rubber duck? All children, however, wear dazzling clothes.

Two watch sellers stand looking forlorn, holding dozens of watches. "How is business?" I ask. "Very bad," they say in unison. A sudden rush near a bus catches my attention. Walking over, I hear the bus conductor yelling, "Ticket prices reduced! Ticket prices reduced!" The look of glee on the passengers' faces is priceless.

Departing crowds are aggressive at Sadarghat river terminal, where launches large and small wait to take them home. The afternoon sun is merciless as sweating passengers rush this way and that, grabbing children, luggage and assorted goodies, frantically searching for their launch. They stop to pick a few jumbo pineapples, perhaps some apples and grapes, from wharfside vendors. Inside their launch, they stake their spot with a cloth sheet and settle down, already dreaming about time with family.

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India promises greater market access to neighbours

Reduce sensitive list of goods by 20 percent next month

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India has promised greater market access to its South Asian neighbours, including Bangladesh, by reducing its sensitive list of goods by twenty percent next month under the South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta).

"By next month, this will be a reality", said Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma at the first meeting of South Asian Forum here on Thursday.

Items included in the sensitive list are not subject to the preferential tariff cuts and member-countries of the Free Trade Agreement have to continue to pay normal tariffs on these.

India maintains a sensitive list of 431 items for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and 848 items for non-LDCs under Safta for which no duty-free concession is given.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, during his recent visit to Dhaka, had announced duty-free and quota-free access to 46 textile items from Bangladesh.

Sharma said India's fulfilling its commitment of reducing tariff lines under sensitive list by 20% for all Saarc by next month will complete a critical requirement of Safta agreement signed by Saarc member countries.

"Time has come to take a call on reduction of barriers to trade. Safta is

moving forward on the path of economic integration and India should give full support so that the region realises its full potential" he said.

With continued global economic crisis threatening the flow of investment from rich nations to poor and needy under-developed countries of Saarc, South Asian nations need to tap intra-regional trade and investment by giving greater market access and facilitating free flow of investment through lowering of tariff and non-tariff barriers, Sharma said.

"India's trade with Saarc stands at mere \$13 billion at a time when our global trade has expanded to cross \$600 billion. Indian companies have

stepped out and engaged in foreign shores investing over \$100 billion and more than 90% of this investment has been outside South Asia. Indian investment flows into Saarc has been around \$10 billion.

"This clearly brings out the imperative of creating a more conducive investment climate, a more harmonious linkage between our industry bodies and a strong political commitment for an integrated South Asia" he said.

FICCI in partnership with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is hosting the first meeting of South Asia Forum. Being the first of its kind in South Asia, the meeting is supported by the MEA.

Right activists' sit-in at shaheed minars Sept 13

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of rights activists will stage a sit-in programme in front of shaheed minars in every district across the country on September 13 to press home their seven-point demand including removal of the communications and shipping ministers.

Representatives of the activists under the banner "Chhatra-Shikkhak-Peshajibi-Janata" (students, teachers, professionals and people) announced the programme at a press conference in the city's Dhaka Reports Unity yesterday.

The one hour sit-in programme will begin at 12:00noon.

Their demands include removal of all corrupt ministers and officials, ensuring normal deaths of citizens, stopping the issuance of 24,000 driving licences recommended by the minister and modernising the process of issuing licences.

They also demanded for steps to prevent corruption and ensuring discipline in the

communications sector, amending existing laws to prevent road accidents and ensuring accountability in the administration.

Noted journalist Kamal Lohani said he visited several places in the country in the last few days and found the condition of roads and highways in a sorry state.

Pointing at the prime minister, he said, "It is not possible for you to understand public suffering as you move safely on the road by blowing whistles."

Leader of the movement and eminent writer and columnist Syed Abul Maksud, in a phone message, said, "The movement is not against the government or in favour of any political party. We want a society where normal deaths will be guaranteed."

Mishuk Munier's brother Asif Munier, film actor Ilyas Kanchan, National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports Convener Engineer Sheikh Mohammad Shahidullah and actor Rokeya Prachi also spoke at the programme.

MUGGERS THROW OFF 7 FROM TRAIN

Two cops, 2 Ansars suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two police constables and two Ansar members were suspended yesterday after muggers pushed seven people off trains, killing four of them and injuring three, after looting valuables in separate incidents on Wednesday, said railway sources.

The suspended constables Siddique and Nurul Huda and Ansar members Suruj Ali and Emdad Hossain were posted on Agnibina Intercity train that day, said Railway Circle Inspector Amirul Islam Dewan.

Meanwhile, the three injured, travelling

on the rooftop of a Dewanganj-bound train, identified two alleged muggers, Hasu and Afer Ali, among four people arrested from the rooftop after it reached Jamalpur on Wednesday night, said police.

The arrestees Hasu, 16, Afer Ali, 15, Johurul, 16, and Subuj, 17, were produced before a Jamalpur court, which sent them to jail yesterday.

Meanwhile, railway authorities formed a three-member committee to investigate whether there was negligence in duty by police in the incidents, said sources.

RMG export to India to shoot up

Say experts

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh could easily grab a \$2 billion chunk of Indian apparel market taking advantage of duty and quota-free accesses of 46 apparel items to India, analysts and exporters said.

They also suggested that Bangladesh should increase its capabilities for exploiting the untapped potentials in readymade garment (RMG) sector in India.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said at present Bangladesh exports garment products worth \$50 to \$60 million to India.

"We could easily grab \$2 billion from the \$30 billion Indian apparel market," he told BSS.

Rahman said zero tariff benefit always brings some advantage creating capacity but it should be kept in mind that India does not import those items from international market.

Commenting on the duty and quota-waiver, Commerce Minister Faruk Khan termed it as a "great victory" saying Indian apparel businessmen are now protesting the move of the Indian government.

BGMEA President M Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, described the move as a "trump card" to reduce Dhaka-Delhi trade gap, saying it has created a scope for removing trade barriers between the two countries.



Tailbacks of trucks and passenger buses at Paturia ferry terminal for the last four days due to low navigability in the Padma, disrupting ferry services. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

DAULATDIA-PATURIA ROUTE

Disruption in ferry services cause tailbacks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Ferry services on Daulatdia-Paturia route remained suspended for three hours yesterday morning as four ferries ran aground in shoals in the Padma one after another, creating a huge tailback at Daulatdia ferry terminal.

Hundreds of buses and trucks were lined up on 4 kilometre road stretching from the ghat to Daulatdia Union Parishad office around 3:30pm while around two hundred vehicles remained stranded at Paturia ghat at 4:00pm.

Ro Ro ferry Shah Poran left

Daulatdia ghat for Paturia with 18 vehicles around 6:15am and was stuck in a shoal after 10 minutes, said Jillur Rahman, assistant manager at Daulatdia office of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC).

Ro Ro ferries Keramat Ali, Shah Ali and Bir Shreshtha Hamidur Rahman also ran aground in shoals within half an hour.

After two hours of hectic efforts, rescue vessel IT-389 salvaged the ferries around 9:00am with over 100 vehicles onboard, added Jillur.

Nine Ro Ro and one K-type ferries transport vehicles through a single

channel on the route.

As four of them got stuck, the channel was blocked causing the halt to ferry services.

Many people of 21 south and south-western districts stayed at the Daulatdia ghat for hours as over 1,000 vehicles remained stranded there.

Hundreds of drivers and staff of goods-laden trucks have been waiting at the Daulatdia ghat for the last three to four days. They are left in the lurch as they run short of money to buy food.

Truck driver Shahadat Hossain said his truck has been stranded at the terminal for four days and he was

still uncertain when he could reach Dhaka.

According to a BIWTC official, the Daulatdia ghat has become a site of regular tailbacks as ferry services are disrupted frequently due to low navigability in the Padma.

Two BIWTA dredgers started dredging on Tuesday to keep the channel passable for ferries, noted a BIWTA engineer.

Around 70, 000 cubic metre of sand has been removed from near ghat no-3 till yesterday.

He hoped the channel will be safe for ferry movement within three to four days.



Temperature may fall

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at many places over Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Dhaka divisions and at a few places over Rajshahi, Rangpur Sylhet divisions in next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy to heavy falls are also likely at places over the country, Met office said.

Day temperature may fall by 1-2 degree Celsius over the country.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:08pm today and rises at 5:43am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 35.7 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and lowest 24.1 degrees Celsius at Chittagong.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	31.3	25.6	80	75
Chittagong	29.3	24.1	92	90
Rajshahi	31.8	25.9	95	91
Rangpur	34.0	25.8	73	68
Khulna	28.6	25.8	92	93
Barisal	29.0	25.4	86	96
Sylhet	35.7	25.6	76	76
Cox's Bazar	29.0	24.5	95	92