



PHOTO: STAR

Ansar Baria railway station in Jhenidah district remains under lock and key as the authorities closed down 38 stations under the West Zone of Bangladesh Railway during the last two years due to lack of manpower.

RAILWAY WEST ZONE

Commuters suffer as 38 stations shut down in two years

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Railway authorities have shut down offices of 38 stations in the last two years much to the sufferings of commuters in the West Zone.

The officials have attributed to poor manpower and shortage of locomotives for the situation.

While the stations remain unattended by Bangladesh Railway (BR) staffs, 18 trains on both directions make stoppages at these stations away from the platforms on the alternative line, making it uneasy for most people to get on board due to the unusual height from the ground level.

At the Ansar Baria station in the district, this correspondent talked to a number of commuters who said elderly people, women, students and farmers taking their produces to the markets suffer most due to the closure of the offices. As there is no BR staff available at these stations, the tracks to the platforms have been altered and made direct on a bypass line where the trains stop.

At the station, a good number of male and female students of Rajshahi and Khulna universities get on and get off the trains everyday amid serious risks. Many are forced to look for alternative transports, which are expensive and time consuming.

Tania Aktar, a student of Rajshahi University, observed that the office at the station must be reopened immediately to restore services.

"How can you climb such a height to get on the train?" she posed.

BR sources said, more stations will be closed in the near future if sufficient staffs

are not appointed as soon as possible. Train services also suffer severe setbacks in the region due to shortage of locomotives. A large number of locomotives have also become obsolete, they said.

Between Rajshahi and Khulna, out of 134 stations, 38 have been shut down. There are now 539 station masters against 868 posts while 797 posts in different sections are lying vacant for long, the sources said.

Since 2006, BR has not recruited any manpower. In 2005, so far 1200 employees were recruited. With every station being shut down, thieves are stealing valuable equipment, fixtures and fittings from the abandoned offices, they said.

Mozibur Rahman, a farmer from Jadupur village, said they are unable to take their produces to distant markets.

"These days we are forced to sell our items at low prices in the local markets," he said.

Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) at Pakshi said, gradually more stations are getting closed due to lack of manpower. No step is being taken by the higher authorities despite several meetings, he said.

Divisional Transport Officer (DTO) Subit Kumar Biswas said, the stations have been closed due to complexity of rules to recruit new staffs in the railway department.

"We are running many stations with retired station masters on contracts," said Biswas.

"In the coming year, the situation will be worse with at least 16 stations masters retiring," Biswas said adding, "If replacements are not made timely, those 16 stations will be shut down."

"We have sent formal letters to the authorities concerned but to no effect yet," he said.

Woman FF assaulted allegedly to grab land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Freedom fighter Bhanu Nessa was physically assaulted by a gang at her house at Nandanpur village in Santhia upazila on Tuesday night.

She is undergoing treatment in Santhia Upazila Health Complex.

Bhanu Nessa, 70, alleged that her brother-in-law Jamir Muhari, his son Rana and their hired goons stormed into the house at around 7:00pm and asked her to leave the house. "As I refused to oblige, they beat me up mercilessly," she said. Bhanu said Jamir and his men made the attack in a bid to grab her land. She demanded immediate arrest of the attackers.

Md Ekramul Haque, O/o of Santhia PS, said freedom fighter Bhanu Nessa did not file any case against the attackers.

Freedom fighter Md Nizam Uddin, also the chairman of Santhia Upazila Parishad, told this correspondent that Bhanu Nessa was attacked by her relatives over property related issue.

"We will sit with both sides soon to settle the dispute," chairman Nizam said.

Outlaw held with arms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The Detective Branch of police arrested a member of an outlawed party along with firearms from Balughata Primary School area of Ataikula on Tuesday night.

The arrestee, Md Abdul Malek, 28, son of Abdus Sattar of the village was an operative of a faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP), police said.

Assistant sub inspector of Pabna DB police Md Easin Arafat said, acting on a tip-off, a Pabna DB team raided an abandoned building of the primary school and caught Malek along with the firearm and five bullets.

Monga comes in time but job scheme falls behind

A large number of ultra poor of five Lalmonirhat upazilas forced to look for jobs in capital and other places

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A large number of poor people in the district are passing a tough time due to monga, a near-famine situation that affects the greater Rangpur region during Bangla months of Ashwin and Kartik when farm labourers become jobless in absence of agricultural activities.

To help ease the situation, the government arranges a 40-day job scheme for the ultra poor people during this period every year.

But the programme is yet to start in many areas this year due to delay in allocation of fund from the authorities concerned, said sources at Lalmonirhat District Relief and Rehabilitation Office (DRRO).

The programme in the rest 30 out of 45 unions will start by mid-November, they said.

During October-November last year, the government sanctioned Tk 5 crore 47.33 lakh for the 40-day job scheme to make employment opportunity for the ultra poor in the district, they said, adding that over 10 thousand people will get earning opportunity if the fund for the scheme reaches the DRRO office soon.

Faced with serious hardship, a large number of ultra poor people from different places in five upazilas of Lalmonirhat district have gone to the capital and other places in the country in search of job.

"I and 20 other people of my village are waiting for train to go to Bogra in search of job," Azizur Rahman, 42, of Chondimari village in Aditmari upazila told this correspondent at Lalmonirhat railway station.

Jamal Uddin, 40, of Dolgram village under Kaliganj upazila said he and 10 others from the village were going to the capital



PHOTO: STAR

People at Rajpur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila engage in an earth-cutting work under the government-run 40-day project meant for creating employment opportunity for the ultra poor affected by the seasonal monga, a near famine situation, in a few northern districts including Lalmonirhat.

with hope to earn by pulling rickshaw.

"We will have to suffer till the start of harvest of transplanted aman paddy after about 20/25 days," said Mozammel Miah, 48," a farm labourer at Kalmati village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

The people, who earn livelihood by pulling rickshaws in the district, are also facing difficulties in maintaining their families.

"I can hardly earn Tk 80 pulling rickshaw all the day, as I get only a few passengers. And so, I and my family members have to remain half starved," said Ramoni Barmon, 40, of Uttar

Saptana area in the district town.

Several day labourers including Mozir Ali, 45, Niyamat Miah, 32, Taher Ali, 46, Mominul Islam, 50, of Char Kulaghat village in Lalmonirhat Sadar, and Suza Miah, 40, Jabbar, 28, Ali Mohammad, 52, of Paruliya village in Hatibandha upazila said they are living a miserable life due to the job crisis.

"I have borrowed Tk 4,000 at 10 per cent monthly interest from a money lender of my village, promising to repay the money after earning during aman paddy harvesting period," said Jalal Uddin, 42, a day labourer at Char Gobordhon village of

Aditmari upazila.

"The government's 40-day job scheme during October-November last year helped us to survive during the seasonal crisis but now we are badly suffering as the programme has not started yet," said Monowar Hossain, 42, a day labourer at Harati village in Lalmonirhat Sadar.

Habibur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Lalmonirhat, said, "My office is yet to get allocation for the 40-day job scheme from the government this season. As soon as the allocation is made, I will start the programme meant for helping the ultra poor people fight the seasonal crisis."



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Illegal shops have mushroomed occupying both sides of the road to Kuakata sea beach at Kalapara in Patuakhali district although buses and cars are supposed to use the space as parking lots. The photo was taken a week ago.

College girl injured as stalker throws acid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A college girl sustained burn injuries as a stalker threw acid on her in Nandail upazila of the district on Tuesday.

The victim, Ferdous Ara Lipi, 20, is a first year honours student at Mominunnessa Government Mohila College in the district town.

She is undergoing treatment at the burn unit of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Lipi, daughter of Abdus Sattar of Niviaghata village in the upazila, came under attack by Shafiqul Islam, 22, son of Hafiz Uddin of the village, while she was going to her college in the morning.

Police quoted family sources as saying that Shafiq, also a first year honours student at Government Gurudayal College in

Kishoreganj, had been stalking Lipi for long and recently he proposed love that she refused.

When Lipi boarded a human hauler to go to Atharabari Bazar to catch a Mymensingh-bound bus at around 8:00am on Tuesday, Shafiqul also boarded the same vehicle and locked in an altercation with Lipi.

At one stage, Shafiq threw acid on Lipi's face and jumped off the vehicle, said Khondaker Zahidul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Nandail Police Station.

The other passengers of the human hauler chased Shafiq to catch him, but he managed to escape. Lipi's family filed a case with Nandail Police Station the same day.

Deputy Commissioner Lokman Hossain Miah and Police Superintendent Golam Kibria visited Lipi at MMCH yesterday. They ordered immediate arrest of the culprit.

3 electrocuted in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Three people were electrocuted in Sadar upazila yesterday.

The deceased are day labourer Jinnat Ali, 50, his wife Shahida Begum, 40, and another day labourer Mozibor Mia, 50, of Deldha village of Kakua union.

Union parishad chairman Bodiuazzaman Faruque said the three were cutting grass beside the Deldha market at around 2.30pm.

Mozibor was electrocuted first when he touched a snapped electric wire of an irrigation pump.

Hearing his scream, Jinnat and Shahida went to rescue him and became electrocuted.

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