

Railway incurred Tk 24cr loss for BNP hartals

Sangsad told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway has incurred a loss of Tk24 crore due to "violence and subversive activities" carried out by BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami men during hartals since February 28, Railways Minister Mujibul Haque told parliament yesterday.

He was responding to a query tabled by Awami League lawmaker Nasimul Haq Chowdhury.

The railway, noted the minister, was implementing 48 projects involving Tk23,780.06 crore to improve passenger services and make its network more dynamic.

Of the schemes, 44 are investment projects and the rest are technical assistant projects, mentioned Mujibul.

Under the projects, metre gauge, broad gauge and dual gauge railway track will be laid, while two cranes and 20-set commuter trains will be procured.

The construction of the

Second Bhairab Bridge and Second Titas Bridge will also be completed under these projects, maintained the minister.

Most of the schemes are scheduled to be completed between 2013-14 and 2014-15 fiscal years.

19.5cr REGISTERED VEHICLES Communications Minister Obaidul Quader informed the House that the country has 19.5 crore registered vehicles.

Responding to lawmakers' queries, he said 14.5 crore drivers had valid licences and five lakh more might have fake ones.

But, interestingly, deducting the valid driving licence owners (14.5 crore) from the total number of vehicles (19.5 crore), the result is five crore.

No correction was made on this issue either from the minister or from the parliament secretariat during yesterday's sitting.

Bangladesh still lacks

FROM PAGE 20

Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) report of the US State Department released in Washington DC on June 19.

It said Bangladesh does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so.

According to the report, the government drafted rules to implement the 2012 Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act (HTDSA) and began prosecuting cases under the law.

It said the government took limited steps to regulate fraudulent recruitment agents and their unlicensed subagents. Inadequate trafficking victim protection remained a serious problem.

As per the report, Bangladesh has failed to improve its status in last one year as the country retains its 2012 position and remains in Tier-2 of the three-tier system.

In 2012, Bangladesh improved its status and reached Tier-2 from Tier-2 Watch List in 2011.

The report said some of

the Bangladeshi men and women who migrate to the Gulf, Maldives, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Europe, and elsewhere for work subsequently face conditions indicative of forced labor, such as threats of force, physical or sexual abuse.

Quoting a civil society group report, it said that some Bangladeshi men in the Gulf, particularly in the United Arab Emirates, are vulnerable to being subjected to forced labor in other countries, including Greece and Spain.

Some women and children from Bangladesh are transported to India and Pakistan, where they are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor. Some in the Rohingya community in Bangladesh have been subjected to human trafficking.

The US report recommended finalising, adopting and disseminating the implementing rules for the HTDSA, and training government officials including law enforcers, labor inspectors, and immigration officers on its implementation.

It suggested taking steps to sharply reduce all recruitment fees charged by licensed labor recruiters, and enforcing violations with criminal sanctions; increasing efforts to prosecute trafficking cases and convict trafficking offenders.

The report asked to improve oversight of Bangladesh's international recruiting agencies to ensure they are not promoting practices that contribute to labor trafficking; provide support services for adult male trafficking victims and victims of forced labor.

It said Bangladeshi embassies in destination countries should shorten the time required for victims to receive documentation required for repatriation, and establish a toll-free labor exploitation hotline accessible by cell phone to facilitate victim identification.

Being in Tier-2 means Bangladesh do not fully comply with the minimum standards of US Trafficking Victims Protection Act but is making significant efforts to that end.

Teaching

FROM PAGE 20

drop of water as it floated in mid air.

Using a live video link, Wang fired questions at students who gathered at a school in Beijing to watch the lesson on a giant screen.

More than 60 million students and teachers were expected to watch the class, the state-run China Daily said.

"In space... how can we tell if we have become thinner or fatter?" she asked students, with a red Chinese flag visible behind her.

"We can use electric scales," one eager young boy replied, dressed in a white shirt and the red scarf of the young pioneers, a youth organisation run by China's ruling Communist Party.

"Have you seen any space junk?" another student asked Wang, before she replied: "We haven't seen any, but it does exist."

The lesson covered topics in physics including Isaac Newton's second law of motion, and the surface tension of water.

China launched three astronauts into space on board the Shenzhou-10 craft last week.

The craft later docked with the Tiangong-1 in a test intended to prepare China to build its own permanent space station.

GAZIPUR CITY POLLS

EC to arrange special security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will take special security measures in the upcoming Gazipur City Corporation (GCC) election as it is an industrial area, and mainly dominated by workers, said Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad.

"We have seen [observed] in the past that many silly matters turned into massive occurrences in Gazipur due to labour unrest. So, we will take special measures, and additionally deploy bomb disposal units and dog squads to avert any untoward incident," he said.

The CEC was talking to reporters after a meeting on the law and order situation in the forthcoming Kishoreganj-4 by-elections and the GCC polls slated for July 3 and 6 respectively at the EC Secretariat in the capital yesterday.

Besides, a 22-member team of law enforcement agencies would be deployed at every polling centre during the maiden GCC polls while a 27-member team

would be in place during the Kishoreganj-4 by-elections, Rakibuddin added.

Saying that there were two highways through Gazipur city that might hamper security measures, the CEC urged citizens not to use these two highways on the day of the election.

With the aim of maintaining law and order and preventing violation of the electoral code of conduct executive magistrates had been deployed in the electoral areas, he mentioned.

"We have issued show cause notices and fined some candidates, and removed 19 billboards used for election campaigns in Gazipur," said Rakibuddin.

Coast guards would remain alert so that the force could be deployed if necessary any time during the Kishoreganj by-polls, the CEC continued.

In response to a reporter's query, Rakibuddin said the commission would publish a gazette on the results of the recently held four city corporation elections within the shortest possible time.

Pak army killed 450

FROM PAGE 20

said it was a pre-planned and systematic attack on Rupshi, Bausgari and Demra villages.

Shamsul, who stayed at his friend Benu Roy's house during the attack, woke up at the sound of brushfire.

"On the road I saw Moulana Motiur Rahman Nizami, Ishaq Moulana and Moulana Subhan along with the Pakistan army. The army shot dead whoever they [Nizami, Ishaq and Subhan] had pointed out," he said.

Shamsul said he had hidden in a drain beside a spaddy field from where he witnessed the massacre.

"People running for life were being shot from behind, houses were burning, and girls were being dragged to vehicles," he said while describing what he had witnessed.

He added that about 137

houses, shops, mosques and educational institutions were burned and around 30-40 women were raped.

"College students Shikha and Shila were picked up and their whereabouts are still unknown," he added.

The witness, who was also a freedom fighter, said among the 450 martyrs, Ajgor, Ahes, Abdul, Abul, Aken, Hafez, Ofaz, Khude Roy, Bolram Roy, Dilip Kumar Roy, Monindra Nath Nondi and Alam Pramanik were his acquaintances.

He said Nizami along with 100-150 Razakars had gone to Sathia Pilot High School and launched a Razakar camp there in mid-May.

At the launching ceremony Nizami had called upon the Razakars to kill the freedom fighters and anyone who had connections to liberation and encouraged youths to join the force,

Shamsul added.

The witness, who observed the ceremony from the other side of a canal adjacent to the school, had heard Nizami's call from locals attending the programme.

He said Nizami, who was the chief of All Pakistan Islami Chhatra Sangha during the war, had set up an Al-Badr camp with Chhatra Sangha members at Pabna Alia Madrassa.

"He [Nizami] was the president of Al-Badr and on his directive and order killings, mass killings, looting, arson, rape and other crimes against humanity were committed," said the witness.

In his two-hour-long deposition the witness said Nizami, Subhan, Ishaq, Rafiqun Nobi and notorious collaborator Asad on May 10, 1971 went to Rupshi Primary School and met the

school's headmaster.

"At the school Nizami told locals that Peace Committee would be formed and the Pakistan army would restore peace soon. He asked the locals to assist the Pakistan army," he added.

On receiving information of the meeting, Shamsul approached the school and saw the collaborators coming out of the headmaster's room.

The witness said the Pakistan army attacked, looted and set fire to his father's house at Shalgaria in Pabna on April 11, 1971.

He claimed Nizami had helped the army find out the location of the house.

Nizami, who is facing 16 war crimes charges, was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

The proceedings of the case were adjourned until June 26.

7 amici

FROM PAGE 1

Crimes Tribunal (ICT)-2 on February 5 had sentenced Mollah to life for committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

Yesterday, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told the court that Quader Mollah deserves death penalty for each of the six charges brought against him before the ICT-2.

The apex court adjourned the appeal hearing till July 7 when the court will reopen after a vacation. The vacation will begin on Sunday.

The government on February 18 amended the ICT act clearing the way for filing an appeal with the SC against the tribunal's any inadequate sentencing of a convict.

On March 3, the prosecution filed the appeal with the SC. The following day, Mollah filed another appeal with the court seeking acquittal of all six charges.

No trace yet of AL's

FROM PAGE 1

he was picked up by a number of former Chhatra League leaders and taken away in a vehicle, according to locals.

A few hours later, news spread that Jahangir had met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also the AL chief, and decided to pull out of the race and work for Ajmat Ullah.

Jahangir has not been seen in the city since.

All the mobile phones of Jahangir, his wife, brothers and close aides were found switched off yesterday. His followers and workers cannot communicate with him.

Salahuddin, one of the supporters, however, said he had a brief mobile-phone conversation with Jahangir on Tuesday midnight. "He [Jahangir] has asked us to continue his electioneering."

Salahuddin, a resident of Tongi Deowra area, told our Gazipur correspondent over

the telephone yesterday that without using any loudspeaker, they kept campaigning for Jahangir by door-to-door visits.

On Tuesday night, Jahangir's mother Jaeda Khatun fell sick during a conversation with her son over mobile phone, he added.

Relatives of Jahangir Alam do not want to talk about him with journalists.

Contacted, Ataullah Mandal, general secretary of Gazipur sadar upazila unit of AL, said he did not know anything about Jahangir. "I have not seen him for the last two or three days."

Rafizuddin, another local AL leader, claimed that Jahangir had extended his support to Ajmat Ullah.

Asked, AK Mozammel Haque, president of Gazipur district unit AL, said Jahangir was mentally

depressed as he was dissuaded from contesting against the AL-backed candidate.

"That is why he avoided public appearances over the past couple of days. But Jahangir will join us in the campaign for Ajmat Ullah," claimed Mozammel, also an AL lawmaker.

Mozammel said: "Jahangir was convinced that he would not win the election. And party leaders told him that he would lose both election and party position if he stayed in the race."

He said Jahangir was not forced but convinced to support Ajmat.

"Former leaders of the Chhatra League were involved in talking him [Jahangir] into withdrawing his candidacy because they were his former colleagues in politics," the AL MP said.

Extend amnesty

FROM PAGE 16

will not be able to regularise their status by this time.

Officials of Bangladesh High Commission in Riyadh said out of around 12 lakh Bangladeshi workers in the Arab country, four lakh were irregular. Only about half of them could update their passports and other documents so far.

The rest of the irregular workforce needed at least three more months to get the necessary papers, the officials added.

Bangladesh mission Labour Minister Emdadul Haque said the Saudi authorities were facing a huge workload in the wake of so many foreign workers seeking to legalise their work status.

Other labour-exporting countries, like India, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines, and even busi-

nesses in the Arab country were also placing similar requests to the Saudi government, Haque told The Daily Star.

He said the Bangladesh mission in Riyadh had arranged a job fair on June 19 and 20 to facilitate Bangladeshi workers to transfer jobs and take the opportunity of the amnesty. A total of 50 companies took part in the fair, added Haque.

Saudi daily Arab News reported that Dipu Moni had handed over letters of appreciation from President Muhammad Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah for allowing Bangladeshi workers to change their residency permits and seek new employers.

Poverty-cut rate remarkable

FROM PAGE 1

MDGs. And the country would halve the poverty headcount to 28.5 percent sometime in 2013.

"Against the odds, Bangladesh lifted 16 million people out of poverty in the last 10 years, and also reduced inequality; that is a rare and remarkable achievement," Johannes Zutt, WB Country Director for Bangladesh, said at the launching of the WB report at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in Dhaka.

The lender has made six assumptions, which show that the poverty rate will be between 26.31 and 28.40 percent in 2013 with an annual average reduction of 1.73 percentage points.

According to a survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, poverty declined 1.78 percentage points a year between 2000 and 2005. In the next five years, the reduc-

tion rate averaged 1.7 percentage points taking the number of poor people down to 31.5 percent of the population.

Riding on the growth in labour income and changes in demographics, the number of people getting out of poverty reached 47 million in 2010 from nearly 63 million in 2000.

Despite a growing population, the number of poor people declined by 26 percent in 10 years.

"The series of external shocks that affected Bangladesh in 2007 and 2008 did not significantly slow down the speed of poverty reduction," said the WB report titled "Bangladesh Poverty Assessment: Assessing a Decade of Progress in Reducing Poverty, 2000-2010".

The WB country director said Bangladesh now needs to help a growing population of young adults obtain

the skills and education required to find productive work, and participate fully in Bangladesh's social and political life.

Speaking at the event, Finance Minister AMA Muhith called for administrative reforms, and delegating more power to local government bodies in order to maintain the country's economic growth and its success in eradicating poverty.

"There are 15 crore people in the country. For this population, everything is decided from Dhaka. It is an impossible task. If [the system] is corrupt, inefficient and wasteful, and it will never be able to achieve total success."

"We have to change our mindset of concentrating all power in Dhaka. The situation must change. We have to think how we can take this administration to the local level."

However, poverty contin-

ues to be a daunting problem, as nearly 47 million people still live in poverty and another 26 million in extreme poverty.

Poverty in rural areas is more pervasive and extreme than in urban areas, whereas urban areas remain relatively more unequal, said the WB.

"For sustained poverty reduction, Bangladesh needs coordinated multi-sectoral action," said Dean Jolliffe, senior economist of the WB and co-author of the report.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre, said three governments ruled the country between 2000 and 2010, but the change in power didn't hinder the poverty reduction efforts.

"It is great news for Bangladesh. It shows that there is a larger consensus among political parties on poverty reduction efforts

Hasina says it again

FROM PAGE 1

Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League, said the caretaker government (this time) would try to do everything, which the previous one could not.

Many political leaders including Hasina and BNP chief Khaleda Zia were put in jail during the previous military-backed caretaker government's tenure.

Hasina was speaking at a views-exchange meeting with her party's grassroots leaders from Pirojpur at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

The premier said it is true that the CG system was introduced in 1996 due to their (AL) movement. "But there were rational grounds [for it]."

She went on, "No elec-

tions were held under the BNP government [1991-1996] without rigging. That's why we had demanded caretaker government. But all elections held under the present government were free and fair."

The AL president said the BNP has won all city corporation elections recently, and it is evident that only the AL can hold free and fair election in the country.

"The voters are free to cast their votes. If voted, we will remain [in power], otherwise not," Hasina said. They (AL) have nothing to do if people want to elect a political party which "plundered public money and involved in terrorism."

She said the last caretaker government did not hold

election within the stipulated period, put political leaders and university teachers in jail. Moreover, the Supreme Court declared it [caretaker system] illegal.

"I don't know why BNP wants to bring it back again," she said.

The premier mentioned that an internationally renowned person (she did not name), who was with the AL earlier, had said caretaker government could stay in power for an indefinite period.

If a caretaker government takes over again, Hasina said, someone like him (jurist) might deliver a sermon that it could remain in office till dooms day. And as a result, it would try to do that.

Castigating the section of

people playing the "atheist" card, she said, "We start our day by offering Fajr prayers and we pray five times a day, still they call us atheists. Those who get up from bed at noon are being considered believers."

On Sunday, the premier said in parliament there might not even be any polls if a caretaker government took over again.

About the ongoing war crimes trial, Hasina said the government would implement court verdicts properly.

AL leaders Satish Chandra Roy, Mahbul Alam Hanif, Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Abdul Mannan Khan and Abul Hasnat Abdullah were also present at the meeting.

Riano, 29, is awaiting charges related to allegations that he plotted to bomb the embassy to protest the persecution of Muslims in Buddhist-majority Myanmar.

A police investigator revealed Riano's connection to the page, which was still online yesterday, to The Associated Press. The investigator spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to talk to reporters.

The investigator said Riano caused his own downfall by publicizing his mission on Facebook, but added that police believe it was another Facebook page that drew him to radical Islam to begin with.

Police said a growing



Bangladesh Bank

Human Resources Department-1

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