

DHAKA-SIRAJGANJ ROUTE

Train service resumes after 15-year gap

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU from Sirajganj

After a hiatus of nearly 15 years, a direct train service between Sirajganj district headquarters and Dhaka resumed yesterday as part of a pledge from the prime minister.

Railways Minister Muzibul Haque inaugurated the train service at a programme at Sirajganj Bazar Station around 12:30 pm.

From now on, an inter-city train, Sirajganj Express, will leave Sirajganj Bazar Station at 10:45 am and reach Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka at 3:00 pm, said railway officials.

The same train will leave Kamalapur at 4:00 pm and reach Sirajganj Bazar Station at 9:00 pm.

Railway sources said Sirajganj district was once famous for having five railway stations in its town.

But now, none of the stations exists as the district's rail link had been connected with the Bangabandhu Bridge, 10 km off Sirajganj town, in 1998.

Since then, town dwellers had been deprived of direct train services with Dhaka.

For restoration of train services, thousands of people had staged demonstrations and observed token hunger strike under the banner of Sirajganj Swartho Rakkha Sangram Committee.

Addressing a rally at Sirajganj College field on April 9, 2011, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had assured people of resuming the train service between Sirajganj town and Dhaka.

At yesterday's train service inauguration programme, the railways minister said "The prime minister had pledged to resume the train service, and it has been named Sirajganj Express, honouring the people's demand."

Chaired by Abul Kalam Azad, secretary to the railways ministry, the programme was addressed, among others, by Director General of Bangladesh Railways Abu Taher.



The first Mount Everest conqueror of Bangladesh, Musa Ibrahim, right, along with fellow mountaineers Niaz Morshed Patwari, left, and Sifat Fahmida Nawshin on top of the "highest" peak of Europe, the 18,510-foot high Mount Elbrus. The trio in the First Bangladesh-Russia Friendship Trekking reached the summit around 8:30am local time. Second female Mount Everest conqueror of Bangladesh, Wasfia Naznin, was the first Bangladeshi to reach Mount Elbrus on March 28.

PHOTO: COURTESY

GB must be

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Bangladesh Bank or the MRA," he told reporters at his secretariat in the capital.

Muhith said he told the Grameen Bank Inquiry Commission to work on this issue.

The Grameen Bank Ordinance 1983 now governs the microcredit organisation that has 84 lakh borrowers and members in rural areas.

Muhith reiterated that the government would not change the bank's present structure.

But there has been widespread concern over a possible change in the bank's structure, as the commission plans to suggest that the bank's legal structure should be formulated in a way that gives the government at least 51 per cent stake in it.

The government-sponsored committee will organise a workshop in Dhaka on July 2 to discuss with experts its recommendations on Grameen Bank and 48 associated organisations, all of which are legally inde-

pendent companies.

He said, "The commission approached me for advice. But I told them that I would not give them any advice as I am part of the government."

"I told them that the terms of reference given to the commission are good enough for it."

Muhith said he would attend the workshop.

The minister said Grameen Bank founder Prof Muhammad Yunus made "a mountain out of a molehill" of the commission's future recommendations.

"The commission has not sent the proposals to the ministry officially. It will do that once it finalises the proposals after the workshop."

"Prof Yunus should have not raised questions about the proposals. He is really a politician."

In its interim report, the commission made recommendations on the present situation at Grameen Bank, and the government was working on them, said Muhith.

POLLS-TIME GOVT

Suranjit presses for solution by Oct

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta in parliament yesterday called upon the opposition to come to an agreement by October over an election-time government.

"Please sit for talks during this session of the Jatiya Sangsad.... The ongoing political standoff over the holding of the next general polls must be solved before dissolution of the present ninth parliament by October," he said.

But the two BNP MPs -- Moudud Ahmed and Jamiruddin Sircar -- present at the session said nothing on the issue.

They instead demanded that the government restore the caretaker government system and hold the polls under it.

Suranjit urged the opposition to place a model of a poll-time government in parliament in line with the constitution.

"Let us find a formula for an election-time government through discussion," he added.

He warned that if the election was not held, the president in consultation with the Supreme Court could revive the present parliament. In that case, the opposition or the ruling party would have nothing but to accept it.

BANGABANDHU GAVE RAUSHAN \$70

Speaking on the budget discussion, Jatiya Party MP Raushan Ershad recalled her memory with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on their way to London in 1974.

"When Bangabandhu came to know that I was travelling on the same plane, he asked me through late Col Jamil to sit beside him. He talked about so many things and then gave me \$70. Such a big and kind-hearted man Bangabandhu was," said Raushan, wife of JP chief HM Ershad.

3 lakh Bangladeshis yet

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employs around 12 lakh Bangladeshis.

Saudi authorities had sent an SMS to workers' mobile phones a few days ago, saying the grace would not be extended, Bangladeshis migrant Mohammad Hanif, who had recently regularised his job, said on Wednesday.

"Therefore, the irregular workers fear a crackdown on them after the period," he added.

On a recent visit to Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh Foreign

Minister Dipu Moni requested that the grace be extended by three months. Some other Asian countries -- Pakistan, Indonesia, India and Nepal -- also made similar requests.

Saudi businesses are also strengthening their demands in this regard.

Emdadul told this correspondent over the phone, "I would request our people not to be afraid."

Other Asian countries have around 65,000 workers to be accepting the amnesty. But the number of

Bangladeshis is higher because they could not transfer their jobs or renew residency permits for the last five years, he explained.

Officials of the overseas employment ministry in Dhaka say there are two types of irregular workers in Saudi Arabia. Some have valid documents but work under employers who did not recruit them. This makes them illegal.

"Most of these workers have legalised their status," Emdadul said.

"But the major problem is

with those who ran away from their employers and no longer have passports or residency permits with them."

Saudi labour ministry has submitted around 70,000 passports of such workers to the Bangladesh embassy, which is returning them to the respective workers so that they can apply for the amnesty.

Emdadul could not specify the number of Bangladeshis returning home under the amnesty, but hinted that it was somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000.

First verdict in Facebook threat case

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He has been on the run since January 13.

Judge Md Zahirul Haque of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court pronounced the verdict in his absence.

The sentence will be effective from the day of his surrender or arrest.

This is the first judg-

ment that sentenced a person under the Information and Communications Technology Act, 2006, a public prosecutor told The Daily Star.

Bangla daily Bhorer Kagoj published a report on the threat on April 19 last year, quoting Hafizur's status on the social net-

working site.

AB Siddiqui, president of pro-Awami League organisation Bangladesh Jononetri Parishad, lodged a general diary with Shabbagh Police Station in this regard four days later.

After investigating the complaint, police submitted a report to the court on June 19 last year.

Hafizur had secured bail from the High Court in August last year, after his arrest in a case filed in connection with the threat.

At different times during the trial, the court recorded statements of five prosecution witnesses including the complainant of the case.

Giant leap for Robot

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partner for astronaut Koichi Wakata, who is set to arrive at the International Space Station (ISS) later this year.

KIROBO is to arrive in August in what its handlers say is the first visit for a robot at the space station. Wakata will also be the first Japanese astronaut to command the ISS.

"KIROBO will remember Wakata's face so it can recog-

nise him when they reunite up in space," said creator Tomotaka Takahashi.

"He will be the first robot to visit the space station."

Standing at just 34 centimetres (13.4 inches) tall and weighing about one kilogram (2.2 pounds), the little android is programmed to communicate in Japanese and keep records of its conversations with Wakata.

The robot, which has a wide range of physical motion, will also play a role in some missions, relaying messages from the control room to the astronaut, Takahashi said.

Back on earth, twin robot MIRATA will be on the lookout for any problems encountered by its electronic counterpart.

Takahashi, who said he was inspired by legendary

animation character Astro Boy, said he now wants to create a miniaturised robot that owners could carry in their pocket like a smartphone.

"By bringing a robot into space, the development of a symbiotic robot is expected to move along much faster," Takahashi said, referring to efforts at making robots even more human-like.

Chinese ships in disputed waters: Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Three Chinese government ships yesterday plied waters around islands controlled by Tokyo and claimed by Beijing, the Japanese coastguard said.

The maritime surveillance vessels entered the 12-nautical-mile zone regarded as the territorial waters of Uotsurijima, one of the Senkaku islands, which China calls the Diaoyus, in the East China Sea shortly before 8:30 am (2330 GMT Wednesday), the coastguard said.

The three vessels left the zone after about three hours, it said later.

Ships from the two countries have for months traded warnings over intrusions into what both regard as sovereign areas as Beijing and Tokyo jostle over ownership of the strategically sited and resource-rich islands.

president and director general of Russia State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom welcomed the participants to the city of St Petersburg, which is the birthplace of nuclear power and technology in Russia.

A Gurria, secretary general of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), told the conference that it was highly recommended that all countries use post-Fukushima technology.

Deputy head of Russian government Dmitry Rogozin told the press that the international meet was the third in sequence and is held once in every four years to forge international cooperation in the technology. In the following days, bilateral negotiation between countries would also take place, he added.

Meanwhile, an exposition of nuclear technology participated by nuclear industry leaders of different countries were taking place in St Petersburg.

able clean energy source for the 21st century," he continued, "Its technology is proven with a stable cost. It has low emission and can serve well as a base-load electricity source."

In the context of safety concerns, Amano described technologies, like fast reactors and close fuel cycles, as exciting new steps ahead.

He said ensuring safety remained the top challenge. It is followed by ensuring transparency about nuclear plants so that public confidence is restored with facts and figures.

Advancement in nuclear waste disposal in all countries needed to be achieved, said Amano, adding that Finland, Sweden and France had made impressive progress in this regard.

The IAEA chief noted that while nuclear power plants were very expensive to build, its low operation cost over a lifetime stretching between 30 to 50 years made energy cheap.

S Kirienko, conference

Use of nuke power

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UAE and Saudi Arabia are also rolling out their nuclear power projects to ensure energy mix for long term sustainability.

Amano said after the 1986 Chernobyl accident, global interest in nuclear power waned. However in case of Fukushima incident, the interest did not actually wane due to global response in dealing with the accident. It created a deep public concern about the safety of such plants.

"I am not undermining the safety concerns. The Fukushima people are still facing the consequences. Decommissioning the plant is still a challenge. But we have understood the root cause of the problem and the condition of the affected plant is now stable," Amano noted. "This incident did not stop anything. South Africa, India, Russia and China are making new plants."

"Many nations believe that nuclear power is the sustain-

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