

The Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway near Gazipur intersection has been in this sorry state for the past six months causing misery to pedestrians. The authorities had dug up the side of the road for development works and left it like that without restoration. The photo was taken yesterday.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

GSP FACILITIES AL seeks people's help for restoration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League yesterday sought cooperation from people of all sections to help restore Bangladesh's trade benefits under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme of the US.

"We hope that we'll be able to regain the GSP facility by overcoming all odds," AL Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif told journalists at the party chief's Dhanmondi office in the capital.

In a warning, the US on June 27 suspended trade privileges for Bangladesh after a six-year review exposed "serious shortcomings" in safety and labour standards.

There will be a dialogue in Geneva, Switzerland on July 8 between Bangladesh and the USA, European Union, and International Labor Organization (ILO) on the government's steps in improving working conditions in garment factories and allowing trade unions, he added.

The next course of action will also be taken based on the talks, said Hanif.

The AL leader said BNP chief Khaleda Zia wrote an article in the Washington Times urging the USA to cancel the GSP facility and they had proof of the claims. Hanif asked Khaleda to seek apology to the country people for taking anti-state stance.

Hanif said Khaleda not only wrote that article but also resorted to lies when the GSP facility was suspended. He said BNP leaders had threatened that Khaleda would write more articles in the future. Hanif presented an emailed letter to the journalists where David S Jackson, executive editor of the Washington Times, confirmed that the article was written by Khaleda Zia.

DHAKA-CTG HIGHWAY Unchecked robberies worry businesses

ARUN BIKASH DEY and SHAHADAT HOSSAIN, Ctg

Hijacking of goods-laden trucks and lorries on the Chittagong-Dhaka highway, especially between Sitakunda upazila in Chittagong and Daudkandi upazila in Comilla, has become rampant despite "preventive measures" by police.

Organised gangs hijack the vehicles mostly in the evening or in the dead of night after holding the driver and helper hostage and sometimes even killing them.

Victims suspected that the robbery gangs, who hijacked in Dhaka city and Savar areas some years ago, were now committing robberies on the Chittagong-Dhaka highway. Police did not confirm the claim but held the inter-district robbery gangs responsible for the hijacking.

Seeking anonymity, a top police official of Chittagong range said some leading businesspersons and politically influential people were also involved in the robberies. They buy the stolen goods at a very cheap price, he told The Daily Star. He also said the robbers were patronised by a section of politicians.

Rashid Majid Dhaniya, owner of private freight transport firm MM Transport, said at least 15 goods-laden trucks had been hijacked between Comilla Cantonment and Daudkandi upazila since May.

The gangs first target a truck and follow it until reaching a convenient location for hijacking, said SM Habibur Haque, president of Chittagong Port Truck Owners' Association.

Some drivers also have links to robbers, he said, adding that the gangs maintained good relationship with some police officials. So, owners often try to get their stolen goods released by negotiating with the hijackers instead of suing them, Haque said.

Officials of BSRM, a steel maker, said three rod-laden trucks of the company were hijacked within a span of six days from June 4-10.

Md Saju, driver of one of these trucks, said he was carrying rods from the BSRM factory in Chittagong to Gauripur in Comilla on June 10 when some 11 robbers with a microbus waylaid his truck in front of Comilla Cantonment around 2:00am.

"They tied our hands and beat us for the key. When we refused to hand them the key, they sedated us and two of them turned on the ignition with a screw driver," he said. "The truck was later found in Daudkandi area, and we were rescued by locals."

Business leaders in Chittagong have expressed deep concern over the rampant robberies.

Mahbul Alam, president of the Chittagong Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), said, "We shared our worries at a meeting with the home minister at CCCI on May 15 and urged him to make the highway police more vigilant."

He said, "If the goods are looted on the highway, how will the businesspersons run their businesses?" Ali Ashraf Bhuiyan, additional superintendent of police, Comilla (south zone), however, claimed that highway robberies were now "under control to a great extent" for nightlong vigilance by highway police.

He said robbers travelled in different type of vehicles, so it was not practically possible to check each of the nearly 15,000 vehicles that plied the route daily.

Bhuiyan said they had increased patrolling and erected checkpoints at the vulnerable points, but victims say they hardly saw policemen around at the time of danger.

BNP leader Nazim Uddin gets bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to former BNP lawmaker Nazim Uddin Alam in a case filed against him for damaging and torching vehicles during a road blockade programme enforced by the main opposition in December last year.

The case was filed with Savar Model Police Station against 65 leaders and activists of the BNP-led 18-party alliance, including Nazim Uddin and Amanullah Aman, for committing such offences on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway at Aminbazar at about 11:15am on December 9.

Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Nazmul Haque Shyamal passed the order after Nazim Uddin appeared before the court and sought bail in the case.

During the hearing on bail petition, the defence lawyers said their client surrendered before the High Court seeking anticipatory bail.

Their client received bullet injuries during the road blockade programme and was abroad for treatment. So they prayed for bail on humanitarian grounds, lawyers said.

Meantime, hearing on charge framing against the

Death anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Today is the 26th death anniversary of Abdul Hakim Bikrampur, former member of the undivided Bengal Legislative Assembly and Pakistan Provisional and National Assembly.

Bikrampur Smriti Sangsad, Smriti Pathagar, KK Govt Institution and Munshiganj Girls High School, which were founded by him, have organised an elaborate programme, including a Qurankhwani and a milad mahfil, on the occasion, says a press release.

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Police to launch new wing today for VVIPs' security

M RAHMAN

A new police wing, Special Security and Protection Battalion (SPBN), will be launched today to ensure security to the prime minister, president and foreign guests of the same status.

The SPBN will have two battalions comprising 1,400 personnel headed by a deputy inspector general and equipped with sophisticated arms and specialised training to cope with instant threats, said sources in Bangladesh Police Headquarters.

Alongside Special Security Force, President Guard Regiment, Special Branch and National Security Intelligence, the SPBN will discharge duties with units like quick response team, dog squad, bomb disposal unit, intelligence and surveillance and heavily armed group.

The wing was formed on December 26, 2011 upon approval from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said SPBN Additional Superintendent of Police Mohammad Yousuf Ali.

With sophisticated arms which its mother organisation lacks, the SPBN will build foolproof outer cordon surrounding spots the prime minister, president and foreign guests of VVIP status visit, he added.

Besides, the SPBN will also be deployed to put regular cordon around the Prime Minister's Office, Gono Bhaban, Bangabhaban and structures where the prime minister, president and foreign VVIPs stay, he added.

"At present, personnel from different districts and units are brought to put up the outer cordon," said a high official in Bangladesh Police Headquarters.

"This seemed a bit uncoordinated as such personnel are usually not aware of local security threats and infrastructures of spots which VVIPs visit," he said.

He added that the SPBN personnel would be deployed well ahead of scheduled visits so that they can know everything concerned with ensuring security during the visits.

Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir is scheduled to inaugurate the wing through a function in the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Now 642 personnel have been deployed in the SPBN while 758 posts of different ranks remain vacant.

The deputy inspector general's office of the SPBN has been temporarily housed at Mohamadpur in the capital, and it will be later shifted to Mohakhali, said the SPBN sources.

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