

CTG-DHAKA, CTG-SYLHET

Derailment cuts rail links for 10 hours

STAR REPORT

The railway communications of Chittagong with Dhaka and Sylhet, which remained snapped for around 10 hours following the derailment of a freight train in Akhaura of Brahmanbaria, were restored around 6:30pm yesterday.

With the yesterday's incident of derailment, railway communications on the route remained suspended for more than 100 hours in 21 such incidents in the last 11 months, according to sources in the Bangladesh Railway (BR) and newspaper reports.

During the period, Jamaat-Shibir men were reported to have uprooted fishplates, rail tracks, and set fire to wooden plinths, causing derailment on a number of occasions.

They went on the rampage and damaged the railway tracks protesting at the verdicts against the top Jamaat leaders for committing crimes against humanity in the Liberation War in 1971.

Contacted, railway officials did not rule out any such possibility of sabotage in the yesterday's incident.

An official of the BR (East Zone) yesterday told The Daily Star that they would have to examine the tracks to determine whether yesterday's incident was an act of sabotage or not.

Sources said six compartments of a goods-laden

train veered off the track in between Akhaura Railway Junction and Gangasagar Railway Station around 8:15am.

Dhaka-bound passenger trains 'Upakul Express' from Noakhali got stuck at Kasba Railway Station, 'Mohanogor Prabhati' in Comilla, and 'Shubarna Express' at Kosba, and 'Chattrala Express' at Shoshidal.

Chittagong-bound 'Karnafuli Express' was stranded at Bhoirab, 'Chattrala Express' at Metikanda, and 'Mohanogor Prabhati' at Akhaura station following the derailment.

Md Abdul Motalib, superintendent of Akhaura junction, said the derailment had also cut off the rail link with Chandpur and Noakhali.

The train services resumed around 6:30pm after a relief train salvaged the derailed compartments from the track, the railway official added.

In the last eleven months, three persons were killed and 80 others injured in train derailments, the sources added.

Md Tafazzal Hossain, general manager (GM) of Bangladesh Railway (East Zone), said they are unable to carry out maintenance work due to manpower crisis.

"Twelve workers are needed for proper maintenance of five kilometres of rail tracks, while only two are now working there," he added.



Scattered cargo containers, broken wagons and smashed up rail lines after a freight train derailed near Gangasagar Railway Station in Brahmanbaria snapping rail communication between Dhaka and Chittagong and Sylhet for hours yesterday.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA



JS polls on Jan 5

FROM PAGE 1

Star office last night to know if the terminal exams scheduled for tomorrow will be held. The director general of the Directorate of Primary Education said the decision would come today.

However, there was no immediate clarification if the ongoing final exams scheduled for today would be suspended.

Meanwhile, angered by the schedule, opposition grassroots leaders and workers took to the streets and clashed with law enforcers in different districts.

Border force was deployed alongside regular law enforcers in the capital, Bogra and Sylhet to prevent any untoward incidents.

"The government is determined to ensure a peaceful atmosphere. We will show zero tolerance to any move aimed at foiling the election," Shamsul Haq Tuku, state minister for home, told The Daily Star.

A number of BNP policymakers said they saw no hope for a resolution to the crisis as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was hell-bent on remaining in office during the election, which the opposition contests.

"So, we have no alternative but to wage agitation to resist the election," a senior BNP leader told this newspaper, adding that a series of such programmes, including hartal and blockade, would follow.

The ruling Awami League, however, welcomed the schedule and directed its grassroots leaders to bring out processions in support of the announcement.

Party insiders said the government might go tough on the opposition if it created any obstacle to the election.

"We welcome the election schedule. We expect the Election Commission to take all measures for a free and fair election," said

10TH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Total voters	9,19,66,290
Male voters	4,61,23,318
Female voters	4,58,42,972
Polling centres	37,711 (approximate)
Polling booths	1,79,053 (approximate)
Returning officers	66
Assistant returning officers	577
Presiding officers	37,711 (equal to centres)
Assistant presiding officers	1,79,053 (equal to booths)
Total registered political parties	40 (excluding Jamaat)

Mohammad Nasim, an AL presidium member.

This is the first time in about two decades that the EC would conduct the parliamentary election with a partisan government in office. The three previous elections in 1996, 2001 and 2008 were held under nonparty caretaker governments.

Interestingly, the AL that led the vigorous street agitation against the then BNP-led government in 1994-96 for introducing the caretaker government system is now in power to oversee the polls. The AL-led government abolished the system in June 2011.

The BNP-led opposition has refused to join the election under Hasina administration and threatened to resist any such polls. It wants a nonparty government to oversee the election.

Given the prevailing situation, political

analysts are skeptical about holding of the election on January 5 with participation of major political parties.

They cited the election of December 29, 2008, when the Fakhruddin Ahmed-led army-backed caretaker government was in office. The then EC revised the polls fixture four times to ensure the BNP-led four-party alliance's participation, and the then EC and the government advisers made frantic efforts to this end.

No such efforts are visible this time. Ignoring the opposition's threats to foil the election, Hasina formed an election-time government through reshuffling her cabinet.

On November 19, the EC, led by the CEC, met President Abdul Hamid and requested him to take steps to ensure participation of all political parties in the election.

Hours after the EC left the Bangabhaban, BNP chief Khaleda Zia met the president and requested him to take steps for forging a consensus among the ruling and the opposition parties for holding a free, fair and participatory election under a nonparty government.

In his address to the nation, the CEC again called for a consensus between the rivals camps for the sake of advancing the country's democracy.

HANNAN DETAINED

Law enforcers last night detained Brig (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah, a standing committee member of the BNP.

The detention came just an hour after the announcement of the election schedule.

He was picked up from Baridhara around 8:30pm, said Abu Yusuf, assistant commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Media and Public Relations Division.

The reason for the arrest was not disclosed.

US, India for talks, credible polls

FROM PAGE 1

Ambassador to Dhaka Dan Mozena.

The election should be credible as defined by the people of Bangladesh, he added.

Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran said it is for the people of Bangladesh to decide on the course of their future. "We are confident in the wisdom of the people of Bangladesh."

"As a neighbour and a well wisher of the people of Bangladesh, we hope that in the coming weeks and in the run up to the

election, the democratic institutions and process will be strengthened," he mentioned.

The envoys of the two influential countries made the comments after holding separate meetings with new Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali at the foreign ministry in the afternoon.

The US envoy said he shared with the minister the US Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Desai Biswal's message as it was related to the political situation.

Three key points of the message are: Violence is not acceptable. Every political party has the right to have space; space to express its views freely and peacefully.

And thirdly, there should be a constructive dialogue to find a way forward to conduct a free and fair election.

Indian envoy Pankaj Saran said he briefed the foreign minister on the current state of bilateral relations and the progress made in this regard during the tenure of the present government of Bangladesh.

US," Quaderadded.

One such person opposing the deal is Anu Muhammad, a professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University. He said the government discounted three important issues in signing the agreement.

"The government is sealing the deal without doing any homework. Plus, the current government's tenure has ended – it is not eligible to sign such high-profile agreement."

The US has signed the Tifa or Ticfa or similar agreements with 92 countries and regional associations and groups, including the ones with which it has "big business turnover". He said the government did not analyse the efficacy of Ticfa with those countries.

The signing of Ticfa also does not guarantee good relationship with the US, the economist said, while citing the case of Nigeria and Pakistan.

Muhammad's another issue is that the US might strong-arm Bangladesh in discussions. "The US prefers bilateral agreements over multilateral ones as it can flex its muscle then."

Talks for signing the Tifa, which was later renamed to Ticfa, officially started in 2002, although unofficially it began as far back as 1992.

Ticfa with US signed at last

FROM PAGE 1

exports to the US comprise of RMG product, for which 15.30 percent duty has to be paid. In 2012, the country paid \$746 million as duty to the US government for exporting a little above \$5 billion worth of RMG prod-

ucts.

"Ticfa is just a platform for holding talks between the high level officials of the two countries' commerce ministries. I am surprised that many people are criticising our decision to enter into such agreement with the

WHAT'S INSIDE THE DEAL POSSIBLE BENEFITS	
<div><div></div>To set up a trade and investment forum</div>	<div><div></div>Eliminate trade barriers to US markets</div>
<div><div></div>Forum will work to remove impediments to bilateral trade and investment</div>	<div><div></div>Greater trade will lead to higher export earnings</div>
<div><div></div>Promote labour rights enumerated in ILO declaration of 1998</div>	<div><div></div>Foreign direct investment will increase</div>
<div><div></div>Deal to protect intellectual property rights under WTO Agreement on TRIPS</div>	<div><div></div>Generate employment</div>
<div><div></div>Pledge to curb corruption</div>	<div><div></div>Technological know-how will rise in Bangladesh</div>
<div><div></div>Forum to meet no less than once a year</div>	<div><div></div>Encourage private sector contracts between two countries</div>
Either party may terminate the deal.	
<div><div></div>Termination will take effect from a date parties agree to, or 180 days after notification</div>	

Razakars killed

FROM PAGE 16

had also made an all-out attack on his band of freedom fighters at Chulkathi village, which left him injured.

Afzal, 74, led 800 freedom fighters in greater Khulna during the war in 1971.

Unhappy with how things have turned out since the war, Afzal said, "What good the war we fought do? We liberated the country through the war but we have seen the national flag being hoisted on the vehicles of those who took lives our people, violated the sanctity of my mothers and sisters. Surrendering weapons was a mistake."

"I am here [in the witness box] so that criminals get their due punishment and we can see it before our death. Otherwise, I would not have come here [to testify]," said Afzal, who was seen moving with a walking stick.

Afzal said he had joined the then East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) in 1956 but revolted after the historic speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 7 and at the beginning of the war, he along with 14-15 EPR men fought several battles with the Pakistani army.

Later, he went to India and under the orders of Major MA Jalil, the commander of the ninth sector, he carried out an operation in Batiaghata Police Station, said Afzal.

Afzal said Major Jalil sent him to Bangladesh with 300 troops and he set up camp at Kalikhar Ber under Rampal in Bagerhat on August 10, 1971. He later had 500 more freedom fighters trained for his force.

When Kamaruzzaman Tuku, a commander of Bangladesh Liberation Force of Khulna, sought assistance in launching an attack in Bagerhat, Afzal, along with 100 troops marched towards Bagerhat and took cover at Ghanashyampur High School near Chulkathi Bazar for the night of October 13, 1971.

But around 11:00pm, a local Awami League leader's nephew informed him that Razakars were preparing to attack them and within a few minutes, Razakars made an assault from all directions, said Afzal, adding that they fought back and the fight continued until 3:00am.

At one stage, he received a bullet in his right leg but with the help of a co-fighter, he left the school, said Afzal.

When they reached Chulkathi village, they saw establishments of the Hindus burning, said Afzal.

He said they took cover behind a bush near Chulkathi Bazar and saw Razakars bringing people from the village to a wooden bridge there and stabbing them with bayonets. The Razakars were in Khaki shirt, he added.

"Among the Razakars, there was a man who was wearing white pyjamas and Panjabi, and a topee and he had a little bit of beard. The man was telling others 'there is no use keeping them alive. Shoot them'. Then Razakars shot and dumped their bodies in the canal below," said Afzal.

Six of the victims were Hindu while one was Muslim, said Afzal.

Afzal said on the way back, he met Ashrafal, a relative, and enquired about the man ordering the killings. Ashrafal told him that the man was Moulana Yusuf.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md

Shahinur Islam recorded Afzal's testimony before adjourning the case proceedings until today, when he will face cross-examination.

Yusuf, who is historically known as the founder of infamous Razakar force, is facing 13 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide allegedly committed in greater Khulna during the nine-month-long war.

TRIAL OF MOBARAK

The defence yesterday completed cross-examination of the last prosecution witness and investigation officer in the case against war crimes accused Mobarak Hossain at the International Crimes Tribunal-1.

The next phase in the trial is examination and cross-examination of defence witnesses. The defence has submitted a list of 12 witnesses in this regard.

The three-member tribunal of Justice ATM Fazle Kabir, Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Anwarul Haque is expected to give an order today on whether the number of defence witnesses in the case should be limited.

Meanwhile, the judges of the tribunal yesterday expressed wonder at an audacious statement made by defence counsel Ahsanu Huq Hena at the court.

In reply to a suggestion of the defence counsel, IO Shayamal Chowdhury said it is not true that schools and colleges in Brahmanbaria remained open from June to December in 1971.

Responding to another query by the defence, the witness said during the investigation he interrogated a clerk of Brahmanbaria College in this regard, but did not record his statement.

Hena replied: "When I asked the clerk, he answered that the college was open from June to December."

But the IO said it was not true.

At this stage, tribunal Chairman Fazle Kabir asked the defence counsel whether he himself had quizzed the clerk.

In reply, Hena said, "My Lord, it is one thing up there and quite another below."

Incidentally, courtrooms are designed so as to keep judges' seats above.

Responding immediately to this statement, Justice Selim said, "Since you are granted privilege, you talk like anything. Mr Hena, we are at this stage after spending a long time in the legal profession. We have never ever addressed a court in this way."

The tribunal chairman said, "For the first time in my life, I have seen such audacity."

Things improved as the defence counsel said he was sorry.

Hena told the witness that Mobarak was only 13 during the Liberation War in 1971 and was not involved in crimes against humanity. The witness said it was not true.

The defence counsel then asked the IO whether he knew that the accused was the organising secretary of Awami League.

Queried by the tribunal about the timeframe, Hena said in 1971 Mobarak was a supporter of Chhatra League, student wing of Awami League. But the prosecution witness said it was not true.

The case proceedings were adjourned until today.

Mobarak was in the dock yesterday. He has been facing five charges for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity, including genocide, during the Liberation War.

HC asks govt to explain

FROM PAGE 16

partners had expressed their concerns.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith himself had opposed the provision proposed in the bill.

The ACC itself strongly opposed the provision, terming it unconstitutional.

Scrutinising the bill, the parliamentary standing committee on the law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry also recommended that the House scrap the proposed provision.

But nothing could prevent the government from introducing the provision to the benefit of the government officials.

The Jatiya Sangsad on November 10

passed a bill amending the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Act, 2004 to introduce the controversial provision. The president signed the bill into the law on November 20.

During the hearing on the writ petition yesterday, Manzill Murshid, counsel of the petitioner, Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, told the court that the provision goes against the constitution.

According to the constitution, all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to get equal protection of law, he told the court.

Deputy Attorney General Bishwojit Roy represented the government.