



The opposition activists apparently made the rail communication a priority target. Their blockade programme that began on Tuesday saw several attacks on rail lines. Yesterday, a train derailed at Gazipur, *left*, after the tracks were removed, *top middle*. The rail line, *top right*, in Pahartoli of Chittagong and a signal post, in Kadamtoli of Sylhet were torched. But there were two heroes who saved lives. Tajul Islam and Anwar Hossain, *bottom right*, stopped the Meghna Express near Meher station in Chandpur with a piece of red cloth early yesterday after opposition activists uprooted rail lines there.

PHOTO: STAR

Railway the main target

FROM PAGE 1

Train service on Lalmonirhat-Dhaka and other routes was suspended for eight hours after BNP men removed two fishplates at Mohendranagar in Lalmonirhat around 8:00am.

Shibir men uprooted a rail track at Uri-Madhabpur village in Joypurhat early yesterday, halting rail communications with Joypurhat and other districts for several hours till 10:30am. Many intercity trains got stranded at Joypurhat, Parbatipur and Santahar.

A locomotive and five compartments of a passenger train named "Agnibina Express" derailed at Bankharia in Sripur of Gazipur around 10:00pm on Tuesday, after blockaders removed fishplates there.

Such attacks on the rail system by the opposition men since February cost the railway about Tk 30 crore, Railway Minister Mujibul Haque said yesterday.

Road communications between Dhaka and other districts also collapsed as the opposition men continued putting up barricades on different highways yesterday. Ferry and launch services were also badly disrupted on various routes like on Tuesday.

Pro-blockade activists fought

pitched battle with law enforcers and ruling party men and blasted crude bombs and torched buses, cars and other vehicles in different districts, leaving scores injured.

They also blasted several crude bombs inside the district election commission office at Jamalkhan in Chittagong. The extent of damage in the incident could not be immediately known.

Rowdy opposition men also torched ruling party offices in Chittagong, Munshiganj and houses and shops belonging to the ruling Awami League men in Satkhira, report our district correspondents.

In Dhaka, at least nine vehicles were torched and dozens of crude bombs blasted. At least 20 people were injured as the opposition activists clashed with law enforcers, blocking the Dhaka-Aricha highway at Phulbaria in Savar, on the outskirts of the capital.

Nine other people were injured in crude bomb attacks near Shahidullah Hall of Dhaka University in the evening.

The opposition men set fire to three private cars at Ashkona in Uttara, a pickup van at Naya Bazar in Old Dhaka and a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Kalshi of Mirpur.

In Satkhira, Jamaat activist

Shamsur Rahman, 40, died when law enforcers opened fire after being attacked by several hundred Jamaat-Shibir men around 2:30am.

Police said they came under attack at Abaderhatkhola in Sadar upazila when a team of 350 police, Rab and BGB members went to raid Agardari Alia madrasa, a Jamaat hideout.

Inamul Haque, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station, said sensing the law enforcers' presence, the Jamaat men, using the loudspeaker of a mosque, asked their party men to come out of homes and resist the lawmen.

Within minutes, about 3,000 Jamaat and Shibir men gathered at Abaderhatkhola. As the law enforcers marched toward Agordari Alia Madrasa area, the Jamaat-Shibir activists resisted them and hurled crude bombs and brick chips at them, Inamul added.

When the law enforcers were retreating in the face of resistance, the Jamaat-Shibir men put up barricades on Kadamtola-Bashdha road with logs.

At one stage, they attacked the law enforcers with sticks and hurled a number of bombs. Police and BGB men then opened fire, leaving the Jamaat man dead on the spot, the

police officer said.

Additional forces from Satkhira helped the law enforcers move out of the area. Later, the Jamaat-Shibir men vandalised and torched houses and shops belonging to AL supporters. They also looted valuables from their houses, police said.

Meanwhile, a housewife died after a big branch of a tree, being chopped by opposition men, fell on her head. The victim is Ambia Khatun, 28, wife of Harun-ar-Rashid of Gopinathpur of Kolaroa upazila.

In Sirajganj, a union-level leader of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), a pro-BNP student wing, and a Jamaat activist were killed when police opened fire after being attacked near Mukundagati Bazar area in Belkuchi upazila around 1:00pm.

The dead are Masum Billah, 25, organising secretary of Dhukuriabera union unit of JCD; and Abdul Jalil, 55, a Jamaat activist. At least 25 more people were injured, three of them bullet-hit, in the clash that lasted around 30 minutes.

In Gazipur, a pro-AL union parishad member was killed during a clash between the AL and BNP men in Kaliganj upazila.

Kamal Uddin, 30, was a member of Jamalpur Union Parishad in the

upazila.

The clash erupted when activists of the two archrivals brought out pro and anti-blockade processions around 2:15pm, said Nazmul Islam Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Kaliganj Police Station.

In Chittagong, a battery-run auto-rickshaw driver was killed in Patia upazila as his vehicle fell into a roadside ditch after being chased by pro-blockade activists. The victim is Ershad Ali, 22.

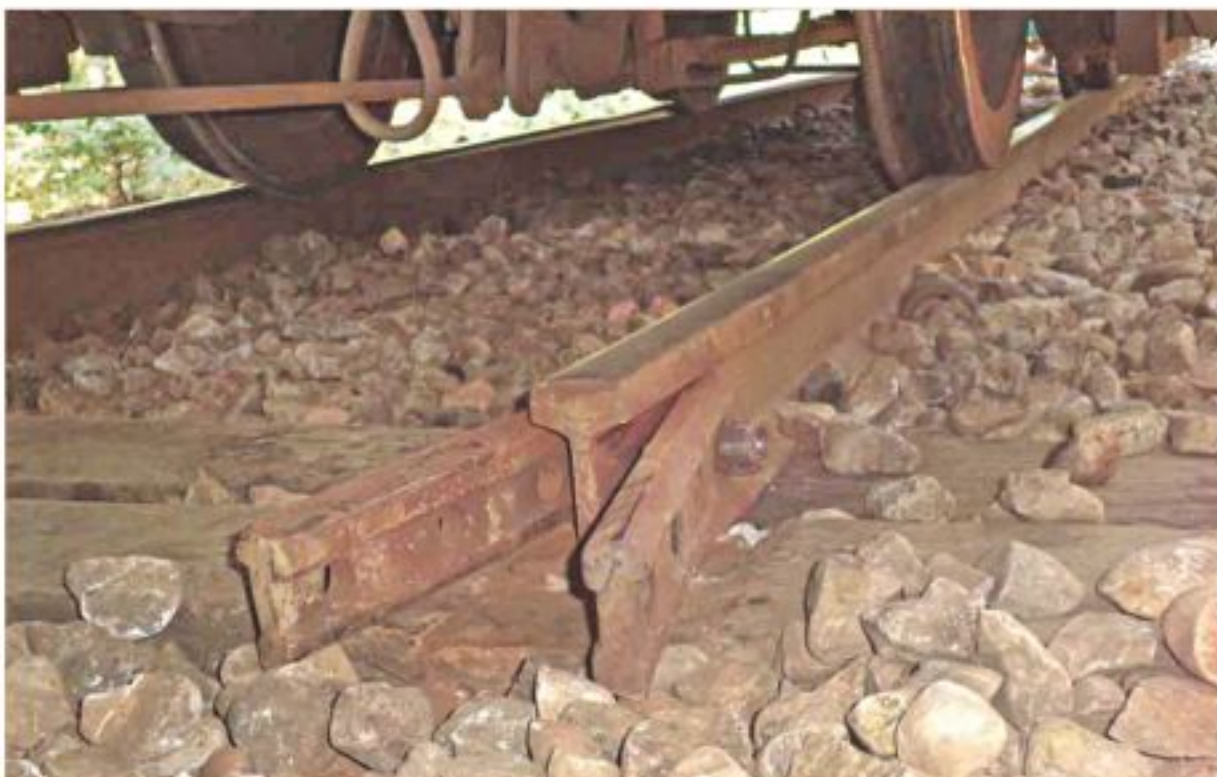
Also in the port city, Mohammad Shayed, 20, died after blockaders hurled a crude bomb on an auto-rickshaw he and his mother were in.

The incident happened at Thakur Dighirpar under Satkania upazila around 7:00pm.

Meanwhile, two people injured in crude bomb and arson attacks on Tuesday, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday, raising the death toll to 16 in the last two days' blockade violence.

One of them is Anwara Begum, 42, who was hit by a crude bomb at Malibagh in the capital. The other is Mozammel, a human hauler driver, who was set on fire in his vehicle by arsonists at Madartek in the capital.

Two more people died in pre-



Train narrowly escapes accident

2 farmers stop the train near uprooted tracks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

An intercity train with 500 passengers on board narrowly escaped a fatal accident on Chandpur-Laksham route, thanks to the presence of mind of two farmers.

Chittagong-bound Meghna Express was scheduled to leave Chandpur Railway Station at 5:00am and was supposed to cross the Meher Railway Station in Shahrasti upazila at around 6:00am.

But the rail authorities were hardly aware of the danger lurking ahead.

The farmers, Tazul Islam and Anwar Hossain, noticed that miscreants had uprooted 60 feet of the rails at Upalata area near Meher Railway Station.

Tazul immediately rushed to his home to fetch a piece of red cloth. As he returned to the damaged stretch of the track, he saw the intercity train was approaching.

He immediately waved the red cloth to attract attention of the guards and driver of the train. Fortunately, they noticed Tazul and stopped the train before passing through the damaged tracks.

Anwar, the other farmer, passed the information of the damaged tracks to a railway mechanic who immediately informed the matter to the station master of Meher Railway Station over the phone.

A team of railway police soon rushed to the spot. Golam Mostafa, the station master, told The Daily Star that a massive loss of lives had been avoided due to the timely and responsible act of Tazul.

AL, BNP leaders

FROM PAGE 1

to avoid blame from the international community for a dire situation, BNP insiders said.

The main opposition party will keep urging the government to resolve the crisis through dialogue to show its sincerity to the foreign countries and donors.

The international community, especially the UN, the USA, EU and India, has long been urging both the feuding camps to resolve the crisis through talks and ensure an inclusive election.

"If we go all out now for resisting the election, we might face criticism at home and abroad for any deteriorating situation. And the government would take advantage of it. So, we now want to move carefully," a senior BNP leader told The Daily Star.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia discussed the overall political situation in the country with some party leaders at her Gulshan office on Monday night before the opposition alliance announced a 48-hour blockade of roads, railway and waterways. Yesterday, the blockade was extended by 23 hours.

BNP chief's adviser Osman Faruk, who was present at the meeting, said,

"The hope for resolving the political stalemate through talks is marginal. We want to give a chance to the government so that it gives peace a chance."

Khaleda is likely to sit today with the senior party leaders to decide the next course of action. If the government does not take any steps to resolve the crisis, the opposition will heat up the street agitation in phases. The alliance might enforce hartal for several days next week, said BNP sources.

To counter the opposition's movement, the AL high command has asked party activists to make all out preparations for the election and put their highest efforts into making the polls successful.

The ruling party high-ups, however, are not much worried about the BNP-Jamaat's movement as they strongly believe that the opposition parties would not be able to go for a tougher agitation. The AL leaders made such an assumption as the opposition could not intensify its movement earlier.

The government will take a tough stance against any move by the 18-party alliance to resist the ensuing election, said sources in the government.

The central AL leaders have already instructed the district leaders to remain alert to any possible violence by the BNP-Jamaat men and to assist the law enforcement agencies to maintain law and order.

China for smooth polls in Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

China hopes there will be a smooth election in Bangladesh in January, which the country's opposition has pledged to boycott.

"As a good and close neighbour of Bangladesh, China sincerely hopes that all concerned parties in the country will put the interests of the whole above everything else," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said yesterday.

He called on the relevant parties to settle their disputes through dialogue, ensure a smooth election, and work together for political and social stability and economic development, reported Xinhua.

TK 2,600CR SWINDLING

Bail for Hall-Mark boss extended

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday again extended the bail to Hall-Mark Group Chairman Jasmine Islam till January 22, 2014 in connection with 11 graft cases filed for swindling over Tk 2,600 crore out of Sonali Bank.

The court also rejected bail prayers for Hall-Mark Managing Director Tanvir Mahmud, its General Manager Tusher Ahmed and Sonali Bank Deputy General Manager Shafijuddin Ahmed after their lawyers submitted separate bail petitions in the same cases.

The court granted bail to Jasmine, wife of Tanvir, after she appeared before it, seeking extension of the bail order in the cases filed with Shahbag Police Station.

Earlier on August 4, she secured a one-month bail in these cases on condition that she would pay back the amount in monthly instalments of Tk 100 crore.

The Anti-Corruption Commission and the accused then challenged the conditional bail order with the High Court, which is yet to be settled. During the hearing on Jasmine's bail prayer yesterday, the anti-graft body lawyers argued that the lower court cannot pass any order as the issue is pending with the HC.

In the 11 cases, the ACC had sued 27 top officials of Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark Group for their alleged involvement in the scam.

The graft watchdog on October 7 pressed charges against 25 of them.

Of the accused, seven, including Tanvir, are now behind bars.

Earlier on November 13, the same court took cognisance of charges against the 25 accused in the cases.

Air passengers in deep trouble

FROM PAGE 16

"I suffered monetary loss, but what hurts me more than that is I could have spent three more days with my family before leaving the country," Ramzan told The Daily Star at Shahjalal International Airport.

Like him, some other passengers at the airport narrated their ordeals to this correspondent.

"As soon as I heard of the blockade, I left my home in Sirajganj for Dhaka," said Md Akkas, a migrant worker to Malaysia.

"I reached the airport around 3:00am on Tuesday and waited here for the whole day," mentioned Akkas, whose flight was scheduled at 1:00am Wednesday.

He starved for hours as the food he had brought with him ran out by noon.

Most of the incoming passengers experienced similar suffering as well.

Manik Ali of Bagerhat, who landed in Dhaka from Dubai yesterday afternoon, was found anxiously waiting outside the airport's canopy area after he learned that he will not be able to

travel home due to the blockade.

"Since I have no other option, I'll have to stay in a hotel," he said.

Some incoming passengers, however, were taking trains or launches to reach their homes, risking their lives.

Travelling in the capital was not hassle free either. Drivers of rental vehicles, particularly the drivers of the CNG-run three-wheelers, were charging the passengers three to four times higher than the normal fares.

Mother's blood on their hands



PHOTO: STAR

Severely injured Anwara was brought into DMCH Tuesday night with a scarf barely keeping her skull together. A homemade bomb hurled from an opposition rally did this to the professional cook who had nothing to do with the dispute between the two parties. Yesterday, her daughter Nasima was calling relatives in tears letting them know that Anwara had died.

FROM PAGE 1

In the last 30 days, 18 people have lost their lives to violence on the streets they were not involved in.

Yesterday at the morgue, her daughter Nasima burst out in fury. "Give me the name of a single politician who lost his life in hartal violence!" she released all her anger at this correspondent.

"We know that the higher-level politicians are responsible for this. They are the ones who give orders. The blood of my mother is on their hands too," fumed Anwara's son Alam Kazi.

Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Khilgaon Police Station, said law enforcers had arrested two people in this connection.

The bomb was thrown at Anwara from a "pro-hartal" rally led by the main opposition BNP, alleged Alam Kazi, claiming that he had gone back to the spot and talked to the witnesses.

"The blockade not only took away my mother, but it also prevented my younger brother, who lives in Khulna, from seeing her alive for one last time," sobbed Alam Kazi.

Anwara always had the dream to pass the last days of her life with her grandchildren around, said her daughter Nasima.

"She always used to say that when her time comes, we lay her to rest at Rupsha in Khulna, where our father was buried 10 years ago. She used to see death as a reunion with the lost ones," she added.

With 60 percent burns, another victim Mozammel died early today.

Yesterday, he was seen screaming in pain at the intensive care unit of DMCH burn unit. His elder brother Sohel Mia had then said, "We lost our father during our childhood and my mother has almost gone blind over the last 10 years. And now I have my brother in unbearable agony due to arson."

The agony ended around 12:30am today.

Sohel told The Daily Star that he had taught Mozammel to drive six months ago.

"We used to drive the same human haulier, which was burnt, by rotation to manage the family expenses and treat our mother," said Sohel, adding that on the day of occurrence, he had driven the vehicle until 2:30pm and the arson took place around 8:00pm.

In the burn unit of DMCH, three-year-old Arif, who could not take the burnt face of his father and had run away, was seen sleeping beside him yesterday.

His father Sabed Ali, a CNG-run auto-

rickshaw driver, sustained 15 percent burns on Tuesday, the first day of opposition-sponsored countrywide blockade.

"He was asking me how his father got to this horrible state. When I said some people had set fire to him, he said he would beat up the ones responsible," said Aleya Khatun, mother of the boy.

Sabed Ali said: "I am a driver but I have always dreamt to send my kids to school and see them make careers. For this, I work hard all day. But now, I am incapable of work don't know what will happen to them?"

Sabed is the only breadwinner of his seven-member family that includes his parents. On top of that, he has to pay a weekly instalment of Tk 500 for a loan he had taken from a non-government organisation.

"Who will look after the family now, let alone bear my medical expenses," added the day-earner.

Meanwhile in Chittagong, another person received severe burn injuries as pickets sprayed flammable liquid on him and set him alight yesterday, on the second day of the countrywide road, rail and waterway blockade.

Mohammad Abdul Alam, 32, proprietor of Gulshan Biriani House, sustained 22 percent burns.

With this, the total number of arson victims in political violence in the last one month rose to 37.

"It was around 9:45am. I was just getting off from a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in front of VIP Tower in the city to open my shop. I have never imagined that within a wink of an eye I would be in flames," said Abdul lying on a bed at Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

He said that since it was a blockade, not a hartal, he had set off to open his business like any other day.

"Is it my fault to go out on business on a blockade day? Why should we, the commoners, be the victim of politics?" he asked with a furious pair of eyes, adding that the politicians did not care at all about the people.