



People gather at the site of the accident that left four dead yesterday. Top right, a basket full of bananas belonging to one of the victims is still there. Bottom right, an illegal structure with signboard reading "Bangladesh Railway Community Police" stands close to the rail tracks.

PHOTO: STAR

Train runs thru' crowd: 4 killed

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along the line Karnaphuli was using.

"Seeing a train coming, Rakib and I stepped on to the next line. When we realised that another train was coming from the opposite direction it was too late. I did not hear any whistle," said Fazlul at DMCH.

Several witnesses also said the

driver of the Jamuna, coming from Mymensingh, did not blow any whistle while passing through the area.

Tafazzal Hossain, director general of Bangladesh Railway, said the rail authority had no fault. People were on the rail line illegally risking their lives, he said.

However, there are widespread

allegations that railway staff, politicians and traders are involved in running these illegal markets on train lines from which a significant amount of toll is collected.

Locals said about 100 traders sell fish on and beside the rail line regularly.

After buying fish from nearby

Karwan Bazar, they start selling from dawn and continue until 11:00am. Many, who either steal or pick fish from the wholesale market, also join in. Several hundred people gather there every day.

Locals buy fish from there.

Deceased Monwara's husband Kawsar Hawlader said she went out

around 7:45am from their Bangla Motor home.

"She used to buy fish there regularly as it is comparatively cheaper there and she usually came back home around 9:00am. Yesterday, she was late and then I saw the news on TV," said Kawsar.

Several hours after the accident, the basket full of bananas belonging to

Nur was seen at the very place where he was hit. His 14-year-old son Monir said his father had gone to Karwan Bazar from Khilgaon to sell bananas.

The bodies of Nur and Monwara were handed over to their families while those of the other two were at Dhaka Medical College morgue awaiting autopsy.

MILITANCY FUNDING

Govt taskforce to keep watch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In an attempt to identify militancy financiers, a government taskforce yesterday decided to monitor the spending by scheduled banks under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities.

In its first meeting, the anti-militancy taskforce also decided to bring mobile banking, money transfer through courier services, and financial transactions in border areas and of NGOs and religious academic institutions under intelligence surveillance.

Earlier in April 2009, the government constituted the National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention, which is still in place, aiming to eliminate militancy through socio-political campaigns. But different government forces were mainly used to deal with the menace and their activities largely remained confined to capturing of militant operatives.

The campaigns never gained momentum. Analysts blame this on a lack of political will of the government. And following arrests of several hundred operatives, the government now claims that militants have lost both their footholds and their strength to regroup.

In the five years since the launching of the counter-militancy drive, the government apparently confined its activities to preparing to-do lists only.

However, on September 1, the taskforce was formed with Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu at its helm, to intensify the government's efforts to trace the sources of militancy funding in the country. The other members of the body include an additional home secretary, chiefs of law enforcement agencies and Border Guard Bangladesh and a representative of Bangladesh Bank.

A top home ministry official told The Daily Star that the ministry would send a letter next week, requesting the finance ministry to set a guideline for the banks' CSR spending.

Speakers in the meeting, held at the home ministry, said many hitherto unidentified organisations and individuals from home and abroad are funding militant activities in Bangladesh. These financiers use academic and medical institutions to spread insurgency, a source in the meeting said.

State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and chiefs of intelligence agencies, police and Rapid Action Battalion attended the meeting chaired by Amu.

Bangladesh gets stolen money back

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The OECD and the Initiative report showed that while some progress has been made in freezing and returning assets siphoned away from developing countries through corruption, much more needs to be done to turn pledges by development agencies to action.

It said corrupt public officials steal between \$20 billion and \$40 billion each year from developing countries, which is equivalent to 20-40 percent of the foreign aid the countries receive.

The "Few and Far: The Hard Facts on Stolen Asset Recovery" shows that

only a tiny share is returned; recovering more of these funds could greatly boost development efforts.

The report documents, for example, how Angola has used assets recovered from Switzerland to finance hospitals and how Tanzania has used returned assets to get more children to school.

In a statement, Jon Lomøy, head of the OECD's Development Cooperation Directorate, said: "Failing to recover stolen assets is a lost opportunity for development.

Bilateral development agencies can and should promote recovery efforts as part of their cooperation with partner countries."

Between 2010 and June 2012, assets were frozen or returned to 15 developing countries.

The countries were Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Arab Republic of Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe.

The STAR initiative is a partnership between the World Bank Group and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to extinguish safe havens for corrupt funds.

STAR works with developing countries and financial centres to prevent

the laundering of the proceeds of corruption and to facilitate more systematic and timely return of stolen assets.

The report recommended that developed and developing countries should adopt, implement and fund comprehensive strategic policies to combat corruption and recover assets.

Countries should identify gaps and be swift and responsive in addressing obstacles encountered during the asset recovery process. They should evaluate the implementation of their policies and consider changes where needed."

Conflicts rattle JP

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heated debate with Bablu over the JP chief's decision to remove the duo from the party presidium.

Ranga and Tajul blamed Bablu for influencing JP Chief HM Ershad to take action against them, several lawmakers present there told The Daily Star.

Bablu told the duo that he didn't know anything about the matter, and it was the party chief who made all decisions.

Tajul then joined the debate, and criticised the JP secretary general for the way he was running the party.

Tajul asked Bablu why he had spoken at the press conference without

informing them.

JP leader and Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud, who was present there, sided with Bablu, according to the lawmakers.

Ranga and Tajul later went to the prime minister's office in parliament and informed her about the matter.

On HM Ershad's decision to remove Ranga and Tajul from the JP presidium, Bablu earlier told reporters that the JP constitution empowered the party chief to take any action against any party leader for violating the charter.

"The two leaders [Ranga and Tajul] spoke against the party chief," Bablu said.

He claimed there was no division in the party over the appointment of deputy leader of the opposition in parliament.

Asked about Tajul's comment on Wednesday that Ershad was destroying the party by making unilateral decisions, Bablu said Tajul is a controversial leader.

Tajul told reporters at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday that JP lawmakers elected him as opposition chief whip and Raushan Ershad as the leader of the opposition.

"Raushan Ershad is our leader in parliament. All party lawmakers are united under her leadership," he said.

JP insiders told The Daily Star that

Ranga on Wednesday night called on JP presidium member Mahmud, known to be a close aide to Ershad, at his Gulshan residence.

Ranga requested Mahmud to convey to Ershad that he was loyal to the party chief.

The rift between Ershad and his wife Raushan reached its peak over some issues, including the appointment of deputy leader of the opposition in parliament.

Raushan wants to see Feroz as deputy leader of the opposition while Ershad wants Bablu to have the post.

The JP chief last month suspended Feroz from the party's South Dhaka city unit.

Old formalin in new bottle

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The restrictions have surely had a deterrent effect on the formalin importers, as only 19 kilograms of the chemical was imported in the last five and a half months, Sadik observed.

Last year, 10,923.45 kg formalin was imported, while the figure was 1.28 lakh kg in 2012 and 1.64 lakh kg in 2011, according to Chittagong Customs House.

"Sales of paraformaldehyde and similar chemicals increased at Mitford Market following imposition of restrictions on formalin import," said a chemical wholesaler at the market in Old Dhaka, asking not to be named.

"Formalin or similar chemicals are no longer sold openly," the trader added.

ABM Faroque, professor of pharmaceutical technology at Dhaka University, said, "Formalin is entering the country under other names."

"I have so far identified 25 types of chemicals that can easily be transformed into formalin," said Faroque, who has been working on the impact of formalin on the human body for a long time.

Of the 25 chemicals, paraformaldehyde has been imported in large amounts after the imposition of restrictions on formalin import. Paraformaldehyde can be turned into formalin with 37 percent water solution,

the expert said.

According to his estimate, Bangladesh needs 100 tonnes of formalin a year for academic and medical purposes. But more than 500 tonnes of formalin were imported a year before the restriction was imposed.

"So, we previously consumed 400 tonnes of formalin a year, and now we are consuming formalin under the name of paraformaldehyde," he said.

Formalin is a solution in water of the gas formaldehyde (CH_2O).

Apart from being used at labs in educational institutions and hospitals, it is used in pharmaceuticals, and plastic and furniture industries.

Formalin is not produced in Bangladesh or even in neighbouring India. The demand for the chemical is met through import mainly from China, he said.

In fact, a section of traders at Mitford Market imports formalin from China, he said.

Faroque said an action plan should be devised to check the abuse of this poisonous chemical.

He urged the government to continue its drives to stop use of formalin in food. "The police should be well-equipped to carry out drives."

The expert also suggested making the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh the



Formalin jars seized in Old Dhaka during a drive on June 28.

sole agent for import and marketing of formalin. And sales of the chemical should be limited to licensed users such as hospitals and educational institutions.

The government should maintain a record of the import and use of formalin, and engage mobile courts in markets to check sales and use of the harmful chemical, he said.

"Handing down exemplary punishment to the culprits could be the best way to check abuse of formalin," said Faroque.

Admitting that there are loopholes in the existing law, Ruhul Amin Sarkar, additional secretary (imports) at the commerce ministry, said, "When we amended the policy on formalin import, we did not include the names of other chemicals similar to formalin."

He said the ministry had already taken an initiative to impose a ban on import of all types of chemicals that could be used as substitutes for formalin.

Abul Hossain Mia, director general of National Consumer Rights Protection Department, said poultry and fish hatcheries were the biggest users of formalin.

"A section of traders is using formalin or similar types of chemicals not only in fruits but also in other food items," said the chief of the Department tasked with ensuring adulteration-free foods.

PHOTO: FILE