

BCL men 'seize buses' for toll

Released by police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Chhatra League activists of Mirpur Bangla College allegedly seized eight buses of New Pallabi Express over "toll" on Wednesday and demanded Tk five lakh from the bus authorities for their release.

The buses, which ply the Gabtoli-Abdullahpur route, were released from the college campus by police later that day.

Sirajul Haque, director (finance) of New Pallabi Express, told this correspondent that they introduced 30 buses on the Gabtoli-Bangla College-Mirpur 10-Kalshi-Abdullahpur route in October this year.

A few days after the buses started operating on the route, BCL leaders of the college unit demanded Tk 6,000 per day from the owners and threatened us with stopping the bus service if their demand was not met, he said.

Sirajul mentioned that they settled

on giving Tk 3,000 per day and had been paying the toll regularly. But they stopped paying a week ago when local Awami League and Jubo League leaders advised them not to pay. "We stopped paying as per their advice," he said.

After they stopped paying, Mujibur Rahman Anik, general secretary of BCL's Mirpur Bangla College unit, started pressing the owners for resuming the payment. "All bus operators pay us regularly," Sirajul quoted the student leader as saying.

The BCL leaders had been repeatedly issuing threats for the toll for the last one week, he added.

Around 1:00pm on Wednesday, Sirajul came to know that some BCL activists took eight of their buses to the college campus.

He then asked the staffs at Gabtoli and Abdullahpur counters to suspend the service. They, however, resumed the bus service yesterday.

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A man inspecting the wreck of the oil tanker after it was pulled out of the Shela river yesterday. The tanker went down in the river loaded with furnace oil early Tuesday causing damage to the environment of the Sundarbans, the largest of its kind in the world.

PHOTO: STAR

My treatment

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The cell door opens. The next session, seemingly the 100th in a row. I think my first period of interrogation lasted three full months. Two teams of interrogators running shifts, day and night.

Each session begins with shouting, to wake me up. Then they hit me on the face and the back. I am so desperate for sleep, my head is swimming. There are photographs of faces stuck all around the walls of this room. They demand that I identify the individuals, but I can barely focus to see if I might know them. The shouting and the insults get louder, and then they nod to a man in the corner. He injects me twice in the arm with some unknown substance. It's the last thing I know.

The freezing cold cell. The cell door opens. This time the guards enter, making awful honking noises, like wild animals.

I tried to refuse to eat the little food they bring me, in protest at all this. The interrogator laughs at me, but then turns angry; he swears

loudly, and pours an army meal pack over my head. They tell the man in the corner to start feeding me intravenously. He inserts the tube in two different places on my arm and makes it bleed.

The freezing cold cell. The cell door opens. This time the guards push me on the floor and take turns trampling over my back.

I tell the interrogators that I can't face not eating any more. They throw food on the floor of the room and tell me to eat like a pig. They won't let me go to the restroom. They watch as it gets more painful, and laugh as they get the translator to describe how they will rape me if I pee in my pants.

The freezing cold cell. The cell door opens. They make me stand and salute the American flag.

I'm in a sort of cinema room, where I have to watch videos of other prisoners being abused. Then they tell me that I have to dance for them, and run in circles whilst they pull on my chains. Every time I try and refuse, they touch me in my most private areas.

Animals start to die

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Meanwhile, the authorities pulled the sunken oil tanker ashore around 11:00am yesterday, some 30 hours after the accident. But all the 3.58 lakh litres of furnace oil the tanker had been carrying already spilled into the rivers and the adjacent canals.

The ship is now in safety, said M Giasuddin, managing director of the owning firm, Harun & Company.

Two of the six containers of oil in the vessel were completely damaged, Giasuddin said. "We are checking to see if the four other containers are all right."

As of last evening, the slick spread over a stretch of more than 60km -- up to Koromjal in the upstream and up to Kachikhali in the downstream. At least 20 canals connected to the Shela river were polluted.

The impact of the pollution is yet to be determined and officials are working to that end.

The slick started on Tuesday morning, after the oil tanker, Southern Star-7, carrying 3.58 lakh litres of furnace oil and eight crew members sank near

Mongla around 5:00am. It went down after being hit by a cargo vessel from behind. Seven crews managed to swim ashore, but its captain Mokhlesur Rahman is still missing.

Meantime, the authorities have asked the local people to collect the furnace oil and sell it to the Padma Oil Company agents. Locals have been advised to use fishing nets, sponges or any other manual means to collect the oil.

"We have been asking the local people to collect the oil and sell it to the agents of Padma Oil. They would be able to collect it by using sponges or nets," BIWTA Chairman Shamsuzzoha told The Daily Star yesterday, when asked about the cleaning plan.

A number of TV channels also quoted him as saying that Navy vessel Kandari-10 would spray a powder adhesive to increase the density of the oil. It will then be swept away through fishing nets from at least 20 points.

However, one forest official said they did not allow the BIWTA to spray the powder adhesive, as that could

harm the biodiversity of the Sundarbans further.

The Mongla Port authority may start applying the powder today if they get clearance from the environment department.

To stop the spread, the authorities have banned plying of vessels through the Shela river until further notice.

"The forest department and the district administration will enforce this decision," Shamsuzzoha said.

Plying of vessels through the reserve forest, a Unesco natural heritage site, is illegal at any time under the environment protection law.

When pointed this out and asked why the authorities did not ban plying of ships earlier, Shamsuzzoha said they had to allow it since the alternative route, the Mongla-Ghorisakhali channel, lost navigability.

"But now we have been forced to make this decision because of the accident," he said, adding that now all the commercial vessels would go through the Pashur river via Akram point.

But though the decision was made

at a meeting yesterday morning, this correspondent saw around 3:00pm three vessels plying through the route where the accident happened. The three ships are MV Jal Bihanga, MS Shurovi Carriers and MV Beauty Keraniganj.

The oil slick will have a severe impact on the aquatic lives and the mangrove plants grown along the shorelines where the thick layer of oil has gathered. Fish and other aquatic lives would start dying in large numbers in a day or two, while the mangroves might start dying after a month. The spill will also cause a huge problem on the shorelines of canals and rivers the animals of the mangrove forest drink from, wildlife experts told this paper on Wednesday.

"Not only the aquatic resources, all the animals of the Sundarbans will be affected by this accident as all the animals come to the rivers and canals to drink water," said Monirul H Khan, an eminent tiger expert.

But the most horrific thing is that the oil would be in the ecosystem for up to 50 years, he added.



A huge tailback on the Bangabandhu Bridge approach road in Tangail yesterday morning. Several accidents on the road and on the bridge in the dense fog resulted in the traffic jam.

PHOTO: STAR

Fog disrupts transport

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dip below 10 degrees Celsius. Yesterday, the country's lowest temperature was recorded in Rajshahi, 11.1 degree Celsius. The country might experience a cold spell from December 19 or 20.

FLIGHT DISRUPTION

Some 20 flights of Biman Bangladesh Airlines and other international carriers were delayed up to

12 hours since midnight Wednesday as they could not land at Shahjalal International Airport, said airport sources.

Two flights from Bangkok and Kuwait were diverted to Chittagong airport from Dhaka while another flight from Singapore to Kolkata airport. The two flights, however, took off for Dhaka from Chittagong around 11:30am yesterday.

Nine Biman flights were either diverted to other airports or delayed for hours. The disruption to air traffic left hundreds of passengers stranded at different airports.

A Biman official said they requested the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) to keep the Chittagong and Sylhet airports open throughout Wednesday night. But the Caab turned down the

request, forcing Biman to divert one of its flights to Kolkata that night. The two airports usually operate till 11:00pm daily.

The Caab suspended flight operations at Shahjalal International Airport from 10:45am to 1:25pm yesterday for a flying-past exercise of Bangladesh Air Force. However, the exercise did not take place due to poor visibility.

2 indicted for war crimes

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incidents while the other charge was related to looting and arson in two villages. The duo, along with other Razakars and Pakistani army, allegedly committed the crimes between October 10 and November 2, 1971.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan fixed January 12 next year for recording the prosecution's opening statement and testimony of their witnesses.

The accused persons, however, pleaded not guilty before the tribunal, claiming themselves to be "totally innocent".

In its order, the tribunal said: "It appears that the formal charge and the statement of witnesses prima facie disclose participation, substantial contribution and abetment of the accused persons to the commission of the offences as specified in section 3(2) of the act [International Crimes (Tribunals) Act-1973]."

It, however, said: "At this stage, neither the guilt nor the innocence can be determined conclusively. However, the accused persons shall be treated innocent, till they are found guilty. Their culpability, if any, can only be well determined at trial only, not at this stage."

According to the prosecution, Mahidur, son of late Subedar Ali Biswas, studied up to class IX. Since prior to 1971, he was involved in politics of Muslim League and joined the Peace Committee and Razakar Bahini during the war to assist the Pakistani army.

He used to stay at the local Razakar camp and commit atrocities around the localities jointly with other members of Razakars, the prosecution alleged.

Afsar, son of late Kutub Uddin Morol, studied up to class V. He had been an active worker of Muslim League since prior to 1971, and joined the Peace Committee and Razakar Bahini during the war.

Being associated with the Razakar members of the local Razakar camp, he used to participate in the atrocities in

those areas, the prosecution said.

The investigation agency of the tribunal started probe against them on February 11 this year and completed their enquiry on October 27. Meanwhile, they were arrested in a criminal case on September 16 this year.

The prosecution pressed three charges against them on November 16 and the tribunal took the charges into cognisance on November 23.

CHARGES:

On October 6, Mahidur and Afsar, accompanied by hundreds of armed Razakars and Pakistani army, attacked the villages Chandshikari, Chamatol, Kabirajtol and Eradot Biswasertola, and abducted 39 pro-liberation people in two phases.

The detainees were tortured in confinement to glean information. Among them, 24 people were eventually shot dead by the accused persons, the first charges said.

On October 13, Mahidur and Afsar, accompanied by armed Razakars launched a systematic attack at Kabirajtol and Eradot Biswasertola and burnt down houses of the villages after looting. The destructive activities were done under the leadership of the two accused.

The acts also forced many people of the village to leave the country, the second charge said.

On November 2, Mahidur and Afsar, accompanied by 30 to 35 armed Razakars attacked the houses of Kalumuddin Mondol, Abdur Rashid, Cajal and Ilias Mondol of village Sherpur Vandar and detained and tortured them.

The attackers also looted valuables of the victims' houses before torching those, the third charge read.

Then the detainees were taken to the Razakar camp set up at Adina Fazlul Haque College and later they were taken to the army camp at Shibganj CO Office. On the following day, they were brought to a place adjacent to the mango orchard of Jagircot Para where they were shot to death, it added.

Comets not source of Earth's water

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The authors conclude it is more likely that the water came from asteroids, but other scientists say more data is needed before comets can be ruled out.

Since August, the Rosetta probe has been orbiting Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, and on 12 November its lander, Philae, made a historic touchdown on the object's surface.

Although the robot's batteries ran out soon

after setting down, it gathered a wealth of scientific data, and the Rosetta "mothership" continues to analyse the wandering "ice mountain".

This unprecedented, close-up look at a comet is helping scientists to answer the fundamental question of whether a bombardment of these primitive bodies brought water to Earth billions of years ago.

And the latest findings, gathered by Rosetta's Rosina instrument, which consists

of two mass spectrometers that "sniff" the gas that streams off the surface of 67P, suggests this may not be the case.

Water on Earth has a distinctive signature. While the vast majority of liquid on our planet is made up of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, very occasionally a hydrogen atom will be replaced with a deuterium atom.

On Earth, for every 10,000 water molecules, three deuterium atoms can be found. This

water has the same physical properties as H₂O, but it is heavier in mass.

The team found that there was far more heavy water on Comet 67P than on Earth.

Prof Altwegg told BBC Radio 4's Inside Science programme: "It is the highest-ever measured ratio of heavy water relative to light water in the Solar System."

"It is more than three times higher than on the Earth, which means that this kind of comet could not have brought water to the Earth."

বাড়ায় জরুরী ভিত্তিতে
ফ্ল্যাট বিক্রী

বিলাসবহুল অ্যাপার্টমেন্ট বিদ্যুৎ, পানি, গ্যাস সংযোগ, লিফট, সাবস্টেশন, স্ট্যান্ডবাই জেনারেটর সুবিধা। ১৩০০ বর্গফুটের রেডি ফ্ল্যাট। মূল্য ৭০ লক্ষ টাকা। যোগাযোগ: প্লট-প/৭২/৩, বৈশাখী সরণী, মধ্যবাড্ডা, গুলশান-১, ঢাকা। ০১৮১১-৪৪৩৭৮৩, ০১৮১৫-৫৯৪১৬৭, ০১৮১১-৪৪৩৭৮৫