

GUARDING RAIL TRACKS 8,000 Ansar, VDP men deployed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway yesterday deployed 8,328 Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) members at 1,041 vulnerable points across the country to safeguard rail tracks and keep the train communication normal.

The deployment comes against the backdrop of rising attacks on the railway, heavily disrupting public transports across the country.

An inter-ministerial meeting earlier on Sunday decided to deploy Ansar-VDP at all risky points of the rail tracks to prevent removal of fishplates and uprooting lines.

The Ansar-VDP personnel will remain on guard primarily for 45 days. However, their deployment depends on how long the ongoing blockade continues, a railway official said.

Alleged blockaders carried out at least four attacks on the railway over last five days. On Thursday, at least 50 passengers were hurt after five carriages and the locomotive of a train heading for Chittagong derailed at Kulaura of Moulvibazar after suspected blockaders removed fishplates from the track.

Before the January 5 general election last year, the railway was on the receiving end of a series of acts of sabotage allegedly carried out by the then opposition alliance activists. At the time the government had deployed Ansar and VDP to safeguard the railway tracks.



Gram Police members guard rail tracks at Dhirashrom of Gazipur to prevent any sabotage by pro-blockade activists yesterday.

PHOTO:
AMRAN HOSSAIN

India won't

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several BNP leaders are seeking the country's support to "restore democracy" in Bangladesh, according to the MEA website.

Akbaruddin made it clear that it is not for India to venture into the internal affairs of Bangladesh, reminding the reporters about India's consistent policy towards a friendly neighbour like Bangladesh.

"We desire a peaceful, stable and secure Bangladesh," he said.

The MEA spokesperson said the government of India only wishes the best for the government and people of Bangladesh.

Earlier on January 7, The Times of India reported that the BNP had sought New Delhi's assistance to "restore democracy" in Bangladesh.

"Failure of democracy in Bangladesh will push it towards extremism, which will have serious security implications for India," BNP leader Nazrul Islam Khan was quoted as saying in the report.

Noab worried

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of the newspaper industry and approved the minute of the previous meeting.

Chaired by Matiur Rahman, the meeting was attended by AK Azad, Tasmima Hossain, Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, ASM Shahidullah Khan, Mahfuz Anam, Reazuddin Ahmed, Syeed Hossain Chowdhury, Altamash Kabir, M Shamsur Rahman and Kazi Anis Ahmed.

9 hurt in bomb blasts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least nine people were injured in crude bomb explosions in the capital within a span of half an hour yesterday amid an indefinite nationwide blockade enforced by the BNP-led opposition alliance.

One of the six incidents took place at the Central Shaheed Minar around 4:00pm, injuring four activists of Nababpur upazila Jubo League, an associate body of the ruling Awami League.

Attending an Awami League rally at Suhrawardy Udyan, the Jubo League members -- Hasan, Javed, Aslam and Latif -- were about to board their requisitioned bus parked near the Shaheed Minar when a crude bomb blasted, leaving them injured, said Jalal Uddin, general secretary of the Jubo League unit.

As many as 200 activists of different AL affiliated bodies had come to the capital from Nababpur on six buses to attend the rally, he added.

Blasts took place at Azimpur, Suritola, Tantibazar and Nazirabazar

of the old part of the city around 3:30pm, said the injured victims.

With splinters in different parts of their body, they were undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. None of them was, however, critically injured.

Rickshaw-puller Samiul, 45, received splinter injuries near Viqarunnisa Noon School at Azimpur. He said he had heard four explosions and got injured in one while passing by with a passenger.

In another incident in the same area, Mahfuza Begum, 30, received wounds in the forehead. She and her daughter were about to get on a rickshaw at the time, said her husband.

Meanwhile, Maria Akter Nipa, 24, was injured when a crude bomb exploded in Suritola.

Abdul Jabbar, 40, received splinter wounds below his knees in a blast in Tantibazar.

Another rickshaw-puller Mohammad Milon, 32, was injured in Nazirabazar.

Unhappy start to new year

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Then came the nonstop blockade called by the BNP-led alliance on January 6. The indefinite blockade is not only hurting the economy but also upsetting the education system.

Most schools in the capital are officially open, but the presence of students is thin. Fearing violence on the streets, guardians do not send their children to schools. The few that allow their kids to go to schools are in constant panic. But what makes them all concerned is the future of their children.

"All the way to and from the school, my daughter and I are scared of being attacked. Still, I take her to the school as it is open. She may lose interest in studies if she stays home all the time," said Shamima, whose daughter studies at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College.

Another mother, Rima Akhter, whose son studies at Dhanmondi Government Boys School, said children did not want to study at home if there was no school.

'IT'S A MESS' The school authorities are equally confused. Though they are keeping their institutions open, students are not turning up in large numbers.

Shahan Ara Begum, principal of Ideal School and College, Motijheel, said, "All the teachers are coming to the school regularly, and we give lessons when majority students are present."

She added attendance of students was better than that in the first week of

this month. "But it has not yet reached the desired level."

Teachers of different schools say they would be in trouble to complete the syllabus if the blockade prolongs.

"We don't want a repeat of 2013 when the academic activities were seriously hampered," said a teacher of Government Laboratory School in Dhanmondi.

Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhibhabok Oikya Forum, a platform of guardians, said all students and their guardians had been held hostage by politicians.

"It is a mess. The schools are open and some kids are going to school while some are not for security reasons. We want the government to provide security to our children," he said, urging the political parties to sit together for a solution.

The political unrest is taking a heavy toll also on the English medium school students.

On Sunday, a renowned school in the city sent emails to the parents thus: "Based on feedback from the majority of parents, as well as low attendance in school this past weekend which made it very difficult to hold classes normally, we have decided to provide unexpected closure homework for the next two days, while we monitor the situation."

Mohitur Rahman, head of accounting department at Dhanmondi Tutorial in the capital, said they were not giving classes as all the students

were not showing up.

"If, say, 30 of 50 students come to the school and we give lessons, then the rest will be deprived."

'YOU CAN'T GET BACK LOST TIME' The O-level and A-level students are taking a huge risk to take their January session exams amid the blockade.

"We are taking the exams amid constant fear of being attacked. But we have to take the exams because if we miss the exams, we miss the session," said an O-level examinee.

These tests are held around the world simultaneously. As many as 7,000 students from across the country registered for this session, which will end on January 28.

The situation in public and private universities is slightly better, given varsity students are grownups and those studying in public universities stay in halls. But many of those studying in private universities are missing classes and tutorials.

Also in panic and confusion are some 10 lakh SSC candidates whose exams begin on February 2. While they apprehend a disruption in their exam routine, they cannot concentrate on their studies at a time when they need it most.

Contacted, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said, "It is not possible to get back the lost time. But we will try our best to make it up the way we did in 2013."

He also urged the political parties not to enforce any programme that disrupts academic activities.

Curfew again

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Of those injured in Sunday's clash, at least seven were admitted to the Rangamati General Hospital, said the resident medical officer of the hospital. An injured cop was sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital as his conditions deteriorated.

Amid the curfew on Sunday, a group of Bangalee youths tried to attack on Maitree Bihar and Ananda Bihar in Rangamati town. Another group tried to attack and threw brickbats on the office of regional council as they came to know some indigenous employees were stuck there. However, law enforcers foiled both of the attempts.

Indigenous youths also that day vandalised and torched three shops located in Bhebdhedi area.

It all started after pro-Awami League student and youth bodies attacked on a blockade called by Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) protesting the inauguration of academic activities of a new medical college in Rangamati.

Meanwhile, at a protest rally on Dhaka University campus, speakers alleged that Awami League leader Dipangkar Talukder of Rangamati provoked activists of Chhatra League to attack on "peaceful blockade" programme of PCP.

Khaleda blasts

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the matter would be decided by the 20-party alliance. "But you will see a positive step from our side."

He demanded immediate withdrawal of additional police force from in front of the BNP chief's office.

"We hoped that the prime minister at her rally would say something about our seven-point demand but she frustrated us as she did not say anything," said Hafiz.

He also quoted Khaleda as saying the ongoing blockade would continue till the government considered their demand for polls under a nonparty administration.

"Our movement is not for going to power. We are fighting for restoring democracy in the country," Hafiz said, quoting his party chief.

Asked about the police action against BNP men, he said the government could not stop the movement by arresting party leaders.

Earlier, a team led by former BNP lawmaker Nilufar Chowdhury Moni met Khaleda. She told reporters later that Khaleda Zia strongly criticised the PM for describing her as the queen of militancy, terror and corruption.

BNP Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed also castigated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, saying she had deceived people through her blatant lies.

"What the prime minister said today [yesterday] at the rally was nothing but blatant lies. She had deceived the countrymen with her speech. People know it very well how police besieged the BNP chairperson by locking the main gate of her office and keeping sand-laden trucks on the road in front of it," Rizvi Ahmed said.

Meanwhile, over 235 people, including four BNP central leaders, were arrested in the capital and elsewhere yesterday as law enforcement agencies continued crackdown on the leaders and activists of the BNP-led alliance.

Detectives last night detained Information and Research Secretary of BNP central unit Habibur Rahman Habib from Tejgaon area. The reason of his detainment, however, could not be known immediately.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion arrested BNP Joint Secretary General Mohammad Shahjahan and BNP

Executive Committee Member Belal Ahmed in the early hour of yesterday while police arrested BNP's Assistant Office Secretary Shamimur Rahman Shamim yesterday afternoon.

They were arrested on charges of their "suspicious movement" and alleged involvement in subversive activities, police said.

Law enforcement agencies so far arrested over 661 BNP-Jamaat men, including BNP acting Secretary General Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, since Khaleda Zia announced the country-wide blockade for an indefinite period on January 5.

Khaleda Zia has been confined to her Gulshan office since January 3.

During yesterday's daylong hartal in Dhaka and 13 other adjoining districts enforced by the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, police arrested 40 BNP men from Savar, Manikganj and Gazipur.

Police also arrested five Mohila Dal activists from Ashulia during picketing.

A team of Rab-1 picked up Shahjahan and Belal from a house at Gulshan and took them to the Rab headquarters, said an official at the Rab headquarters.

Police in an overnight drive on Sunday arrested 67 BNP and Jamaat-Shibir men from different parts of Satkhira for their involvement in subversive activities during blockade, our Satkhira correspondent reports, quoting Kamal Hossain, sub-inspector of district police.

Members of law enforcement agencies yesterday also detained 50 BNP-Jamaat men from Bogra, 42 from Chittagong, 24 from Savar and 20 from Comilla.

Meanwhile, Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the countrymen to take to the streets to make the ongoing anti-government movement a success.

A nine-member delegation of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal Dhaka city unit led by its general secretary Farida Yasmin met the BNP chief at her Gulshan office around 1:00pm yesterday.

"There is no alternative to the ongoing anti-government movement... Everybody has to take to the streets," Farida quoted Khaleda as saying.

British anti-terror drills to study Paris attacks

AFP, London

Britain will seek to learn from last week's attacks in Paris as part of future security exercises, the government said after Prime Minister David Cameron met security and intelligence chiefs yesterday.

The meeting included discussion of what Britain would do in the event of a "multiple firearms attack in more than one location", as happened both in Paris last week and in the Indian city of Mumbai in 2008, Cameron's spokesman said.

"The relevant police and agencies regularly carry out exercises to test their response to a terror attack, including scenarios similar to the incidents in Paris," the government said in a statement.

"The meeting agreed that for future exercises, the relevant agencies should identify whether there are any further specific elements of the Paris attack that should be built into the exercise scenarios," it added.

Britain's terrorism threat level is currently at severe, the second-highest of five, meaning an attack is thought to be highly likely.

Cameron was among the world leaders who attended a unity march along with more than 1.5 million people in Paris Sunday in the wake of the attacks in and around the French capital in which 17 people and three gunmen were killed.

SK Sinha new chief justice

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During his period in the Appellate Division, Justice Sinha was a member of the apex court benches that delivered a number of landmark judgments, including those on the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the fifth, seventh and thirteenth amendments to the constitution.

Twelve killers of Bangabandhu and his family members had been convicted and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court.

An SC bench declared illegal the 5th amendment to the constitution, which legitimised the regimes of Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem, and Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman between August 15, 1975 and April 9, 1979 after the assassination of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975.

Another SC bench declared illegal the seventh amendment to the constitution, which endorsed the military rule of HM Ershad.

Justice Sinha was also in the Appellate Division bench that scrapped the 13th amendment made to introduce caretaker government to conduct parliamentary elections.

He is now a member of the bench that is dealing with the appeals in the cases filed for crimes against humanity committed during the country's Liberation War in 1971. Justice Sinha has been serving as chairman of Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission since 2011.

He will remain chief justice for a little over three years since his retirement is due in early 2018.

Justice Sinha obtained LLB, joined as an advocate of the district court,

Sylhet in 1974 and practised there under the guidance of two renowned civil and criminal lawyers. He conducted sessions trial cases independently till the end of 1977.

He joined the High Court and the Appellate Division in 1978 and 1990. During this period, he worked with eminent lawyer SR Pal as his junior until he was promoted as judge of the High Court on October 24, 1999.

He was made judge of the Appellate Division on July 16, 2009.

Justice Sinha participated in the 3rd International Conference of the Chief Justices of the World held at Lucknow, India in 2002 as a representative of the chief justice of Bangladesh, in the judicial training programme for the senior judges of Bangladesh at Seoul, Korea in 2006 and judicial development programme in Korea, 2010.

SC asks for security

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objects and take necessary measures if faced with a threat, he said.

The government had raised the number of policemen from 130 to 150 at the SC for its security yesterday, he said. "But we need more security inside the courtrooms."

Kuddus Zaman said the authorities were now checking the metal detector archways and CCTV cameras at the court building to determine whether they were functional or not.

Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain had asked all the SC judges to remain alert about their security at the courtrooms, he added.

The SC has become a target of the terrorists, Zaman said, adding that the

authorities will take measures in such a way that access to justice is not hampered at the SC and its security is ensured.

On Sunday, three crude bombs were recovered from inside two courtrooms that created panic among judges, lawyers, litigants, staff and others.

Yesterday, Attorney General Mahubey Alam told reporters at his office that keeping bombs in the books inside the courtrooms was an act of the militants who might have a link with the blockaders.

Meanwhile, BNP leader and Supreme Court Bar Association Secretary AM Mahub Uddin Khokon told a meeting on the SCBA premises that those who kept the bombs in the courtrooms can be identified if the

attorney general, court officials and members of intelligence agencies on duty are interrogated.

Meanwhile, police recovered four crude bombs from the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court building in Chapainawabganj yesterday.

Ohidul Islam, assistant superintendent of district police, said the court staff found the bombs in a bag on the first floor around 11:45am.

Police sent the bombs to Chapainawabganj Sadar Model Police Station.

Someone kept the bombs to spread panic among the lawyers and court staff, police said.

None was arrested in this connection.