

## TRAIN SERVICES AMID BLOCKADE

## Disruption makes passengers suffer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abdus Sobhan has been waiting impatiently at the Kamalapur Railway Station with his family since yesterday morning to go to Rajshahi.

A staff of Rajshahi University, the 57-year-old went to Comilla with his family a week ago. On his way back, he went to the Feni Railway Station on Wednesday at 3:00pm to catch the Godhuli Express to come to Dhaka.

The train which was scheduled to reach Feni at 4:00pm arrived at 8:00pm. It left the station at 9:00pm after waiting there for an hour, and finally reached Kamalapur early hours of yesterday.

Sobhan then waited for the Rajshahi-bound Dhumketu Express which was supposed to leave Dhaka at 6:00am. But it did leave the station around 2:00pm.

He and his family members could not sleep the whole night amid such uncertainty. He was also worried about his 20-year old son who was staying alone in Rajshahi.

Several hundred passengers like Sobhan were seen anxiously waiting

for trains to arrive at the Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday.

Schedule of trains virtually collapsed following authorities' steps to run them below the normal speed in a bid to avert acts of sabotage on trains amid the ongoing nonstop blockade.

More than 130 trains arrive and depart from the station every day, Kamalapur Railway Station Master Sakhawat Hossain Khan told The Daily Star.

Trains on short routes are behind schedule for about an hour. But the long route trains have been facing serious schedule problems. Some of them run even more than 10 hours late, he said.

Miscreants, during the ongoing blockade, removed fishplates from rail tracks, resulting in derailment of the trains and causing disruption in rail communication for a long time, Khan said.

He said trains bound for the north run at half their usual speed in consideration of the safety of passengers.

Khan hoped that the train schedule would become normal once the blockade was lifted.



People fall asleep at Kamalapur Railway Station while waiting for trains yesterday as the railway suffers a schedule disaster due to the blockade. At Banani station, inset, passengers line the rail tracks in wait.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/AMRAN HOSSAIN

## BNP-Jamaat's mindless violence, again

FROM PAGE 1

Punishment is never to burn him alive. What a barbaric punishment has been meted out to these innocent people who were burnt to death. It is as if the agitators had declared a war against the people of this country.

A less dramatic story is that some hospitals are finding it hard to give patients life-saving oxygen because the blockade has disrupted the supply chain of oxygen cylinders. The transport sector is losing Tk 200 crore daily and the RMG sector estimates a loss of Tk 450 crore in the last two weeks. The vegetable growers are watching the fruits of their hard labour rot before their very eyes, and students and parents helplessly look on as schools are forced to remain closed. The overall cost to the economy is far higher than what we have written above.

On top of that, and perhaps equally damaging, is the reinforcement of reputation of the country as a place of undependable political stability and sporadic lawlessness. The pictures of people being burnt alive can trigger shivers through anybody's spine leave alone of an investor whose resources we expect to receive to accelerate our growth. Why should a foreigner risk his life and more importantly that of his family to invest here?

I know of several families who have for years insisted that their children return home from abroad to take over their family business or explore the plethora of opportunities that Bangladesh now offers are no longer source of what advice to give to their children. Hundreds of young men and women who enthusiastically returned to Bangladesh after obtaining the best education from the world over are now double guessing their future, their enthusiasm greatly dimmed by

the present events.

And all this is in the name of democracy. How ironic! When a political leader and her party think nothing of burning of her own citizens to death from a political agitation that they have launched, then whatever it is for, it is definitely not for democracy.

We know that Khaleda Zia is no Gandhi. Nor is Sheikh Hasina or any of the present-day leaders. Yet in moments of crisis we try to recall what great men and women did and hope and pray that our leaders, however small, mean and greedy for power, will rise to the occasion and try to emulate their actions, if not for any other reason than to be associated with a great man through a great action.

We are referring to the incident in 1922, when Gandhi called off his nonviolent movement after some of his supporters turned violent and killed some policemen at Chauri Chaura.

At the risk of our readers laughing at our naivete we are suggesting that the BNP chief reassess her movement, review her stance, denounce the deaths and violence and either redirect her movement on a strictly peaceful manner or, failing to ensure that, call it off. This she should do as a former three-time prime minister and as a leader of the people that she claims to be, and which she is. We are fully aware of the fact that she has a significant following in the country and that even in the worst of times BNP has never received less than 30 percent of the vote in any free and fair election. Even in the January 5 election she boycotted, the popular perception was that BNP would do rather well.

But for Khaleda Zia to moderate

her stance or call off the movement Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina must give her a democratic space that she had denied the BNP and its leader so far. The politics of 'interning', arresting and piling the BNP leaders under mountains of cases can only take the government so far. It will never bring the desired peace and stability without which our country cannot move ahead. The constant "language of threat" to which the BNP and its leaders have been subjected has also added to vitiating the atmosphere.

Sheikh Hasina's government has two options: one to go for a negotiation and the other to go for police action. So far clearly she has chosen the latter. However powerful, effective and widespread police action is, experience has shown that stable solution has always come through talks and never through oppressive action. In the short run, governments are known to be tempted by stern police action as they show some immediate result. But such action is only of limited effect and for a very short time.

The Awami League government will have to face the ultimate question as to how they see the end game and the long-term solution of the current unrest.

Opposition's demand that the government must step down immediately and hold a fresh election is both unrealistic and unrealisable. The government's hope that it will be able to crush the opposition and oppress them into submission is clearly belied by history. So both sides are living in a make-believe world of their own, and it is only the people who are suffering from the irresponsible politics of both sides.

Khaleda Zia must realise that what she is doing in the name of a "move-

ment" is only hurting the ordinary people. Her so-called "aborodh" is hitting the ordinary citizens far more than the government. With each passing day the plight of the general public is getting worse and their anger at the opposition is rising.

Khaleda Zia must ask herself why people have not joined her movement in spite of large-scale corruption, nepotism, cronyism and widespread misgovernance on the part of the government. The reason in our view is the memory of the pre-election violence in the name of mass agitation. The memory of hundreds of people lying in the burn unit of various hospitals, especially that of Dhaka Medical College, is still vivid in people's mind and the recurrence of such scene is frightening the people out of their wits. An all-pervasive deep sense of insecurity is crippling civic life.

So where do we go from here?

The answer lies in Awami League's election manifesto of 2014. Under the heading "Our priorities for this term" the item number 1.3 is National Consensus. It clearly states: "Initiative will be taken to create national consensus among all political parties, classes and professional organisations, civil societies irrespective of groups and opinions on basic issues such as upholding democratic process and ensuring uninterrupted development."

If such an initiative had been taken earlier, maybe the BNP would not have felt forced to go for the present agitation. Awami League may blame the BNP to their heart's content but that is only one side of the story. There is the other side. Awami League should just do what it had promised to the people.

## GOLD SMUGGLING

## Biman men again found involved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Involvement of Biman employees in gold smuggling rackets was found once again upon a primary investigation into the recovery of 14 kilograms of gold on Wednesday.

Following recovery of 120 gold bars from a flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines BG-046, customs intelligence in an investigation found involvement of Emranul Islam, a mechanic of engineering and maintenance section and another Biman staff Osman Gani.

A case was filed against the two with Airport police station yesterday, said Dr Moinul Khan, director general of customs intelligence.

The aircraft was also seized under the provisions of Customs Act 1969. However, the aircraft was handed to

the Biman authorities on condition that they would produce it at any stage of investigation if so demanded by customs intelligence, he added.

Around 12:30pm on Wednesday, the airplane landed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport from Dubai via Chittagong. Customs intelligence officials recovered the gold worth around Tk 7 crore from the cargo hold of the aircraft during a search.

This is the second time that customs intelligence seized an aircraft on charges of gold smuggling. On April 26, 2013 the Biman's aircraft 'Arunar Alo' was seized with 105 kgs of gold at Hazrat Shahjalal Airport.

On December 5 last year, customs authorities sued 10 Biman staff and four others for smuggling 124kgs of gold after an NBR probe pointed to their involvement.

## No doubt about leak

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However, the primary and mass education ministry on November 26 lambasted media reports, terming the allegations "rumours" and "baseless". The ministry even urged media not to publish such "untrue" and "baseless" reports.

"Despite the leak of questions in some places and on websites, claiming the matter as baseless is frustrating," the intelligence report points out.

Pass rates in public examinations have been on the rise but if there are any flaws in the examination process, the entire process of merit assessment becomes questionable, it claims.

"The matter which is most worrying is that questions leak has become so normal that even guardians are running after the leaked questions, which is indeed undesirable," it says.

The report also points to places where incidents of leakage are highly likely.

Question papers are preserved at the state treasury of BG press and offices of education boards in districts and upazilas. "The possibility of leak from these places is highly likely, but the top officials of these institutions

remain out of touch after incidents of leak," it says.

Referring to the Public Examinations (Offences) Act-1980 and (Amendment) Act-1992, the report says incidents of question leak have happened in at least 63 examinations, but no instance of exemplary punishment has been visible yet.

The report says nothing has happened even after two separate probe committees were formed by the education ministry and Dhaka Education Board following the question leak of English Second Paper in last year's Higher Secondary Certificate examinations.

The report claims the officials concerned often try to cover up the truth and conduct examinations on the leaked questions, which is unwarranted.

The report suggests the government prioritize catching the gang to prevent any incident of leak in the upcoming SSC examinations as well as shoring up intelligence watch on coaching centres.

Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman could not be reached for his comments despite repeated attempts.

## Govt to step up

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The 14-party committees will create public awareness against criminal activities, resist BNP-Jamaat pickets from carrying out arson attacks, identify and hand them over to law enforcers.

The state minister at the meeting briefed the alliance leaders about government measures to maintain law and order and sought their help in this regard, said meeting sources.

The committees of 14-party combine would identify criminals and hand them over to nearest police stations, the minister told the meeting at the AL president's Dhanmondi office.

The meeting also decided to hold rallies, launch a mass contact programme and conduct road marches to create public awareness against violence by BNP-Jamaat.

In the first phase, the ruling alliance will hold rallies at Mithapukur of Rangpur tomorrow and at Palashbari of Gaibandha the following day.

The BNP-led 20-party alliance on January 6 enforced an indefinite blockade of roads, rail and waterways across

the country demanding fresh national polls under a non-party administration.

## SPECIAL CONTROL ROOM

The home ministry is going to set up a special control room to monitor law and order round the clock. It will collect information and take instant actions to make sure the law and order is maintained, said sources.

The ministry had opened a similar monitoring cell before the January 5 parliamentary polls last year. The AL also had formed "terrorism resistance committees" at the grassroots to resist violent protests by the then BNP-led opposition alliance.

Speaking in parliament on March 7, 2013, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had called upon people to form committees to resist violence. The Cabinet Division then issued a notification to all divisional and deputy commissioners to form "terrorism resistance committees".

The then BNP-led 18-party combine announced forming "committees for public safety to resist attacks by law enforcers and AL cadres".

## Bribe for every service: TIB

FROM PAGE 1

proper practices in making drugs for the local market and produce counterfeit, fake and unnecessary medicines, he added.

Shahnur Rahman, TIB programme manager (research and policy), said, "Project evaluation committee officials dillydally to convene their meetings. They demand bribes [from companies] for presenting their applications [seeking approval] at the meeting."

Some influential members of the evaluation committees approve licences and drugs, flouting rules and in exchange for bribes and gifts, he added.

In some cases, officials certify drugs even when manufacturers do not have proper equipment, quality control mechanisms and technicians, the TIB found.

Also, drug superintendents approve drug licences without inspecting drug stores. This allows sales of illegal, poor quality and counterfeit medicines.

"Some companies use sub-standard raw materials to make medical products for the local markets, but quality materials for the foreign markets," Shahnur said.

On the other hand, a number of influential companies form syndicates to influence the DGDA to secure approval for importing raw materials and fixing drug prices. They even start marketing drugs well before they get permission.

The study report says the DGDA has some legal shortcomings as well. For example, the Drug Act 1940 and Drug (control) Ordinance 1982 do not specify the standards of medical

## REASONS OF WEAK GOVERNANCE AT DGDA AND CONSEQUENCES

REASONS	RESULTS	IMPACTS
Weak policy, legal framework and enforcement	No punishment, risk of failing to reduce crime	Public health affected
Policymakers' lack of willingness to build institutional capacity	Inability to monitor and control drug market	Irregularities and corruption institutionalised
Shortage of manpower, logistics and skills	Weak inspection creates scopes for corruption	Progress in drug exports run risks of being affected
Lack of laboratory and capacity	Drug quality control hampered	
Lack of transparency and accountability	Internal grouping and indiscipline in distribution of tasks and weak accountability mechanism	
Influence of businessmen and politicians in policy- and decision-making	Influentials get priorities in decision making	

devices, food supplements and cosmetics.

As a result, it cannot take action against those importing and marketing risky and low-quality products.

The regulations for enforcing the Drug (control) Ordinance have not been formulated in the past 32 years.

Moreover, the laws do not specify the number of committees of the DGDA, their methods of work or qualifications of their members. As a result, members are included on political considerations, creating conflicts of interests.

The DGDA fails to check corruption and irregularities because punish-

ments under the laws are light, the report said.

On top of that, the drug administration has fund and manpower shortages. Only 0.18 percent of the country's health budget is spent for regulatory activities compared to 5.25 percent in India and 0.8 percent in Pakistan.

At least 38 percent of the approved posts of the DGDA are vacant. For this, officials fail to inspect two-thirds of the drug stores and test quality of many drugs.

Also, it has no office in 12 districts.

The cases filed by the DGDA take long to settle, which functions as an obstacle to improving governance in

## BRIBING AT DRUG ADMINISTRATION

SERVICES	BRIBE MONEY
Drug registration	Tk 1-1.5 lakh
Foil, Insert, Label approval	Tk 7-9 thousand
Block List Approval	Tk 2-2.5 thousand
Literature approval	Tk 4-5 thousand
Price fixing	Tk 5-6 thousand
Drug Export registration and GMP certificate	Tk 20-30 thousand
Sample test and quality control	Tk 6-7 thousand
Drug licence	Tk 10-15 thousand
Drug licence renewal	Tk 500-1000

SOURCE: TIB

the drug administration. During 2008-14, only 17 of the 78 cases were disposed of.

TIB Trustee Board Chairperson Sultana Kamal has linked the drug administration's weak governance to the overall governance situation in the country.

"But drug is something very much linked to our life. So, the authorities must look at it very seriously," she said.

The TIB suggested amending drug-related laws, increasing manpower and logistics of the DGDA, introducing one-stop and online services for companies and drug stores and taking tough action against law-breakers.