

40km tailback on Tangail highway

Broken-down vehicles, huge traffic key reasons

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A 40-kilometre stretch of Dhaka-Tangail Highway was hit by serious traffic congestion for 11 hours since Thursday night that caused untold sufferings to passengers.

Different reasons including accidents, broken-down vehicles, huge pressure on the road, work of the four-lane project and sleeping drivers were behind the traffic chaos, highway police said.

The tailbacks of hundreds of vehicles, including passenger buses, was first created when a sand-laden truck broke down in Dherua area in Mirzapur around 11:30pm, sources said.

The situation turned acute after a collision between a truck and a private car in Jamurki area in the same upazila around 1:30am.

The tailbacks spread from Chandra Intersection in Gazipur to Rabna Bypass in Tangail after another truck broke down in Charpara area in the

same upazila around 6:00am, the sources added.

Harun-or-Rashid, a private firm official, said he had suffered a lot as his bus took seven hours instead of three hours to reach Tangail from Dhaka.

Truck driver Abdul Hamid said his vehicle was stuck at Hatubhanga, Gorai, Mirzapur, Dhalla, Pakulla, Natiapara and Karatia for at least five hours.

"Actually, the congestion was created because of road accidents and broken-down vehicles," said Khalilur Rahman Patwari, officer-in-charge of Gorai Highway Police Station.

"The situation turned complicated when many of the truck drivers fell asleep in their vehicles after they were stuck on the road," he added.

A huge number of vehicles travelling to 26 districts including 16 northern and five southwestern districts use the two-lane highway. The number of vehicles increases further on weekends and holidays.

PM's visit to boost ties with India

Dhaka, Delhi start preparation

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

As Dhaka and New Delhi began preparatory work for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's upcoming visit to India, diplomats yesterday said her first official visit in seven years would inject new impetus to the bilateral ties between the two countries.

"The visit would also lift bilateral cooperation in politics, economy, defence, trade and investment, culture, and usher in a new chapter of India-Bangladesh relations," said an Indian diplomat in New Delhi.

Another highly placed diplomatic source in Dhaka told The Daily Star

that India was giving highest importance to the Bangladesh PM's visit, which is expected to take place in the first half of April.

Asked about specific dates for the PM's visit, a highly placed source in Dhaka said the visit might happen in between April 8 and 11.

"We are expecting a breakthrough and the outcome of the visit would be extremely beneficial and would have a long-term effect on the bilateral relations," said the source.

The Indian diplomat, who asked not to be named, said Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar

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Singers Subir Nandi and Jhuma Khandaker perform on the third day of the Bengal Sangskriti Utsab - Sylhet 2017 yesterday. The 10-day festival is being held at the AMA Muhith Sports Complex in the city.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Remembering the Pilkhana victims

FROM PAGE 1

people thought some exercises were going on inside the then BDR headquarters.

But the deep loud noise of heavy weapons continued to echo. No one could imagine that a bloody mutiny had brewed in Pilkhana which would jolt a newly formed government.

As the gunshot did not stop, they immediately realised something terrible was happening inside the Pilkhana headquarters of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), which was later renamed as Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

A group of heavily armed border troops were carrying out a mindless killing there.

The mutiny that rolled on for next 33 hours left the nation benumbed, as people stood aghast at the extent of the barbarity perpetrated on the army officers. It left 74 people dead, 57 of

them were army officers.

The brutal incident happened on this day eight years ago.

For the salvation of the departed souls, doa and milad mahfils will be held at all the regional, sectors, institutes and units of BGB today.

Representatives from the president and prime minister, home minister, chiefs of the three forces and BGB director general will place wreaths at the memorial monuments of the deceased.

A special prayer will be offered tomorrow after Asr prayers at Bir Uttam Fazlur Rahman Khandakar Auditorium at Pilkhana.

Meanwhile, family members of the victims are yet to get justice as the trial of the mutiny cases is currently pending with the High Court.

Talking to The Daily Star, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said the HC hearing on the death reference and

appeals might conclude within April.

"I hope that the High Court would deliver its verdict by June," he said.

Later, the court might take some more time to write and release the full verdict. Then, both sides might appeal against the verdict at the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

A special HC bench of Justice Md Shawkat Hossain, Justice Md Abu Zafar Siddique, and Justice Nazrul Islam Talukder began hearing the death reference and 255 appeals in January 2015.

The HC has held hearing on the appeals and death reference for 359 days.

The death reference and the appeals were filed with the HC months after a Dhaka court delivered its verdict in the case on November 5, 2013, nearly five years after the bloody mutiny.

The trial court handed death sen-

tences to 150 soldiers of the erstwhile Bangladesh Rifles and two civilians, and jailed 160 others for life for their roles and involvement in the carnage.

It also handed down rigorous imprisonment, ranging from three to 10 years, to 256 people, mostly BDR soldiers. The court acquitted the remaining 277 accused, but the government later appealed against the acquittal of 69 of them. A total of 846 people, 823 of them BDR personnel, stood trial in the carnage case.

A total of 17,306 BDR jawans are facing trial in 11 special BDR courts and 60 summary trial courts for mutiny. At least 78 accused jawans, both in the carnage and mutiny cases, died under mysterious circumstances after the mutiny. Many of them reportedly died of heart attack in police custody while a few others committed suicide.

Fugitive on paper, jailed in reality

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Asked why he has been facing trial in absentia if he is in jail, Mahbubul Islam said, "From you, I came to know that he has been facing trial in absentia. But we have nothing to do here. The court and police can tell you about it."

WHO IS KAMOL?

Son of Ataur Rahman of Uttar Matbar Bari in Demra of Dhaka, Kamol, 31, is one of the 10 accused in a case filed over the killing of a lawyer and a filling station owner in Dhaka, according to case and jail documents.

Advocate Anwarul Islam and Sheikh Shahed Newaz Babla, owner of Karim and Sons Petrol Pump at Motijheel, were shot dead and two others suffered bullet injuries inside a private car in the capital's Narinda on May 10, 2002.

Babla's mother filed a case the same day with Sutrapur Police Station.

Police arrested Kamol two years later and through the court he was sent to jail on August 7, 2004. He along with another accused, Manik, gave confessional statements on August 23, 2004.

The case was transferred to Dhaka Sessions Judge's Court on July 25, 2006 from Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

The Sessions Judge's Court framed

charges against 10 accused, including Kamol, on August 2, 2007.

But the trial could not begin until September 2013 mainly "due to the prosecution's failure in producing witness". The court recorded testimony of the first prosecution witness on September 29, 2013.

Following media reports that many have long been in jails without being convicted, SCLAO on November 16 last year sent letters to the authorities of all 68 jails across the country, seeking names and particulars of such prisoners.

According to the report submitted by the office of the inspector general of prisons on December 1 last year, there are 462 persons who have spent more than five years in jail with their cases still pending with different courts, Ripon Paul Sku, an official of SCLAO, told The Daily Star recently.

Of the 462 prisoners, 71 have spent more than 10 years in jail with their cases still awaiting disposal and Kamol is one of them, he said.

According to the report, Kamol is behind bars for the last 12 years and his prisoner number is 22,477/04. He was produced before court 92 times till the report submission.

Yet, case documents show that he has been absconding since 2011.

BUT WHY HE IS CALLED 'FUGITIVE'?

Before the trial began, Kamol obtained bail on July 25, 2011. The court in its 64th order in the case granted him ad-interim bail observing that he has been in jail for around seven years and there was no possibility of completion of the case proceedings anytime soon.

On the next two dates for the proceeding -- November 13, 2011 and May 23, 2012 -- Kamol did not appear before the court, which led it to cancel his bail on May 23, 2012 saying "no step has been taken to uphold his bail". The court later described him as a fugitive.

The court documents do not mention the reason behind his absence, but the jailer said, "We have produced him before the court whenever we were ordered."

On April 6, 2016, lawyer Afjal Hossain Sardar of District Legal Aid Office in Dhaka sought bail for Kamol after he was asked by his office to provide the accused with legal assistance knowing his situation from jail authorities.

Afjal's petition said his client has long been in jail and no specific charges were brought against his client.

The court that day did not allow his petition and ordered keeping it in record. Citing case documents, the court said Kamol was on the run and

the defence counsel, Afjal, in the prayer even did not mention the date of arrest of the accused.

"As per the directives of the office, I had filed a bail petition for Kamol and as the court passed the order upon my petition, I came to know that Kamol is on the run," the lawyer told these correspondents on February 13.

"After that, I did not appear before the court for Kamol as he was absconding."

ABM Bashiruddin Miah, assistant public prosecutor (APP) dealing with the case, told this newspaper on February 15 that Kamol is a fugitive as per the case documents.

Advocate Mahfuzur Rahman Chowdhury has been appointed state defence counsel for Kamol and three other fugitives of the case and he cross-examined the prosecution witnesses on behalf of the four fugitives, said the APP.

February 15 was fixed for recording the testimony of the eighth prosecution witness, but the court had to adjourn the case proceedings until May 29 as the prosecution failed to produce the witness.

About the delay in the trial, the APP said the court on several occasions issued non-bailable warrant against the witnesses but they did not appear before it.

IS car bomb kills 51

FROM PAGE 1

Turkish armed forces and allied Syrian rebels have completely taken the IS bastion of Al-Bab in northern Syria from jihadists.

GENEVA TALKS

The first full day of a fresh round of Syria peace talks began in Geneva yesterday, underlining the fragile state of a ceasefire on the ground.

The UN's Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura, who brought regime and opposition delegates symbolically together to launch the talks late Thursday, held separate meetings with them yesterday to hammer out the format for the meetings.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he was "encouraged that the Syrians ... sat together in the same room," his spokesman in New York said, even if it remains unclear whether the two sides will actually hold face-to-face negotiations.

During three previous rounds of talks in Geneva last year, the rivals never sat down at the same table, instead leaving de Mistura to shuttle between them.

"While acknowledging that progress will not be easy, (Guterres) believes strongly that only a political solution can bring peace to Syria and that all those Syrians who have committed themselves to this goal should redouble

their efforts for peace," he added.

FRAGILE CEASEFIRE

It is "important for all sides to understand that war cannot continue and there are reasons why I think it is the right moment" for the talks, Mistura said late Thursday.

The ceasefire "is fragile but it is there, and we didn't have one for many months," he added.

In his welcoming address, the veteran diplomat called on the warring nation's rival sides to meet their historic responsibility. But he played down hopes of a breakthrough.

"I'm not expecting miracles," he admitted while warning of dire consequences if the talks "fail again".

IRAQI FORCE STRIKES IS TARGETS

The Iraqi air force struck Islamic State group targets inside neighbouring Syria, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said yesterday in a statement.

"We ordered the air force command to strike Daesh terrorist sites in Husseibeh and Albu Kamal, in Syrian territory," he said, using an Arabic acronym for the jihadist organisation.

He said the targets were connected with recent bombings in Baghdad but did not provide further details.

A security official speaking on condition of anonymity said it was the first time Iraq aircraft hunted IS targets across the border with Syria.

Trump reverses Obama ban on private prisons

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump's administration on Thursday reinstated the use of private prisons for federal inmates, saying commercial prison operators are needed for the correctional system's "future needs."

Trump's new attorney general, Jeff Sessions, officially rescinded the Barack Obama administration's move last August to phase out the management of prisons by private companies, which Obama's justice department had said proved to be inadequate, more dangerous and not cheaper than government-run prisons.

Sessions said in an order that the move last year had reversed a long-standing policy at the Federal Bureau of Prisons to have private companies involved, "and impaired the bureau's ability to meet the future needs of the federal correctional system."

Nazis tested nuke?

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The report was prepared by countless American and British intelligence officers and also includes the testimony of four German experts - two chemical physicists, a chemist and a missile expert.

It concurs that Hitler's scientists failed in the quest to achieve a breakthrough in nuclear technology - but that a documented test may have taken place of a rudimentary warhead in 1944.

The statement of the German test pilot Hans Zinsser in the file is considered evidence: the missile expert says he observed in 1944 a mushroom cloud in the sky during a test flight near Ludwigslust.

His log submitted to the Allied investigators reads: "In early October 1944 I flew away 12-15 km from a nuclear test station near Ludwigslust (south of Lübeck)."

"A cloud shaped like a mushroom with turbulent, billowing sections (at about 7000 metres) stood, without any seeming connections over the spot where the explosion took place. Strong electrical disturbances and the impossibility to continue radio communication as by lighting turned up."

He estimated the cloud stretching for

6.5 miles and described further 'strange colourings' followed by a blast wave which translated into a 'strong pull on the stick' - meaning his cockpit controls.

An hour later a pilot in a different machine took off from Ludwigslust and observed the same phenomenon.

According to other archival documents, the Italian correspondent Luigi Romersa observed on the ground the same explosion.

It is known that Hitler pursued the goal of nuclear technology and wanted his V-2 rockets to be able to carry them to destroy the UK.

The testimony of the four German scientists in the declassified American report mentions a top secret meeting held in Berlin in 1943 at which armaments minister and Hitler favourite Albert Speer was present for the discussion called a 'nuclear summit'.

In the end the report states that the Allies believe the Germans fell short of triggering the nuclear chain reaction necessary to trigger a nuclear blast - but none could come up with an explanation for what occurred in the skies over Ludwigslust in 1944.

Iraqi forces break into west Mosul

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CTS spearheaded the weeks-long effort to retake areas of the city on the east bank of the Tigris River, only fully liberating it last month.

AIRPORT SECURED

They met fierce resistance from jihadists defending their last major stronghold in Iraq and commanders have warned that the west bank, where IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed his caliphate, would be even tougher.

After weeks spent redeploying across the vast theatre of operations, Iraqi forces rekindled the offensive on Sunday, with the airport the initial target.

"I can confirm that the airport is fully liberated," said Brigadier General Abbas al-Juburi, of the interior ministry's elite Rapid Response units that led the assault.

IS jihadists offered limited resistance at the airport and the nearby Ghazlani base, open and uninhabited areas that are difficult for them to defend in the face of the huge firepower deployed by Baghdad and its allies.

The hardest phase of the offensive on west Mosul still lies ahead.

The west bank of Mosul includes the Old City, whose narrow streets will be impassable for some military vehicles and oblige Iraqi forces to stage perilous dismounted raids.

The jihadists are completely surrounded in west Mosul and have little choice but to fight to the death.

Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation) units that have been in charge of a front in desert areas west of Mosul said yesterday they were attacked by IS fighters coming from Syria.

BORDER ATTACKS

Hashed forces have moved to within striking distance of the IS-held town of Tal Afar, west of Mosul, and the jihadists are likely to be keen to keep some supply lines to Syria open as they weather the siege on Mosul.

IS militants have continued to harass Iraqi forces in areas that were retaken from them over the past two years.

Yesterday, they attacked a border guard position near the Trebil crossing with Jordan, which lies about 500

kilometres (310 miles) west of the capital Baghdad.

"Daesh launched an attack with a suicide car bomb and gunmen on the 2nd border guard regiment near Trebil," an officer in the border guard told AFP, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

"The attack came from several directions and killed 15 border guards, including two officers," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Local officials confirmed the attack and death toll.

Over the border in Syria, IS is under attack on three fronts.

A US-backed alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters has been pushing south towards the jihadists' main stronghold of Raqqa.

Syrian government forces have been pushing east from Aleppo after regaining full control of the second city in December.

And a Turkish-backed rebel alliance has been pushing south from the Turkish border, ousting IS from Al-Bab on Thursday after weeks of deadly fighting.