

City

Tank wagons derail, one falls into canal

Authorities claim Halda safe from oil spill

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Chattogram

Thousands of litres of furnace oil spilled into a canal after three tank wagons of a train carrying the thick liquid derailed in Hathazari upazila yesterday.

The waterbody flows into the Halda river, a unique natural breeding ground for carp.

The derailment occurred in Moddom Deyan Nagar around 2:40pm when the seven-wagon train was taking the oil to a 100MW power plant in the area.

It was coming from an oil depot in Patenga and each of the wagons had around 24,500 litres of furnace oil, said railway sources.

The local administration claimed they acted promptly and was able to prevent oil slicks from spreading to the Halda.

But the wagons could not be retrieved till last night, meaning there are chances that the river could be affected.

The accident spot is nearly three kilometres away from the Halda.

Visiting the area yesterday afternoon, this correspondent saw oil oozing from the wagons in the Morachora Canal. Oil slicks appeared at least one and half kilometres away.

Near Moddom Deyan Nagar, workers were seen throwing sand bags to build a makeshift dam.

Hafizur Rahman, a witness, said he heard a loud bang and saw wagons coming off the tracks. "I saw the train, it looked like its speed was higher than in other days," he said.

Several railway sources echoed his views, but added a probe to this end was underway.

The sources said trains carrying furnace oil are advised to ply at maximum 20 kilometres per hour, but it appeared that the train was running over 30kmph yesterday.

Abu Taher, another local, said the local administration came up with a quick response, which apparently helped prevent oil spills mixing with the Halda water.

Contacted, Hathazari Upazila

Nirbahi Officer Ruhul Amin said they constructed a total of 10 small makeshift dams with sand bags within one and a half kilometres of the spot, put up oil-booms over them and soaked up spilled oil using foams.

Banana trees were also thrown into the water.

"Hundreds of workers were immediately engaged so that the oil can't reach the Halda. We were able to contain the [oil] spill," he said, adding that they hoped to retrieve the wagons by this morning.

Prof Manzoorul Kibria, an expert on the Halda, said the oil did not spill into the river yesterday, thanks to a quick response from the administration.

"Halda and its diversity would have received a heavy blow had the oil flowed into the river," he said, stressing the need for recovering the tank wagons immediately.

Manzoorul also said the railway tracks were too weak to sustain the weight of heavy tank wagons.

He then claimed that the railways did not take any lesson from a similar incident in Chattogram in 2015.

On June 19 that year, another train veered off its tracks and three oil wagons went into a canal in Boalkhali upazila's Khatibchar area. A few days later, a huge quantity of furnace oil spilled into the Halda and the Karnaphuli rivers.

Contacted, Md Borhan Uddin, divisional railway manager (Chattogram Division), said a three-member probe body was formed to investigate yesterday's incident.

The committee members include Md Mizanur Rahman, chief mechanical engineer; Abdul Jalil, chief engineer; and Sujit Kanti Das, chief operating superintendent; of the railway zone. They visited the spot yesterday.

"Another five-member probe body was formed at the divisional level. The committee would submit its report within a week," he said.

He also said the investigation would also look into the speed of the train.



Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury stands next to four BNP MPs-elect -- Harunur Rashid, Mosharrof Hossain, Abdus Sattar and Aminul Islam -- after they took oath in parliament yesterday.

PHOTO: JATIYA SANGSAD

It was Tarique's decision

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BNP, told reporters.

Replying to a query, he said they did not join parliament to give it legitimacy.

"There is no rule of law and good governance in the country. An anarchic situation is prevailing in the country at present. We have come to parliament to speak about these issues," he said.

Asked why Fakhrul did not do the same, he said he was not in a position to answer that and advised journalists to talk to Fakhrul instead.

Later at a press conference, Fakhrul said they opted to join parliament to speak about democracy and Khaleda Zia's release.

"Decisions may change in politics," he said.

Party sources said their joining the House was part of a negotiation with the government to have Khaleda, now in jail after conviction in a corruption case, freed.

"Now we have to see when and how Khaleda Zia is released," said a senior leader wishing anonymity.

BNP sources also confirmed that Fakhrul wrote to the Speaker requesting her to extend the time for taking oath, citing illness.

The Speaker said she had no information about this, while Fakhrul avoided a direct reply.

"Wait and you will come to know in time," he told reporters when asked about the letter.

At the press conference at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office about two hours after the oath-taking ceremony, Fakhrul said they decided to join parliament as part of their movement to free Khaleda and restore democracy in the country.

Fakhrul is usually flanked by standing committee members and other senior party leaders during press conferences. But yesterday, there were no other leaders at his side.

OATH DRAMA

The BNP won six out of the 300 parliamentary seats in the December 30 election. The Gonoforum, a partner in the BNP-led Jatiya Oikyafront, bagged only two.

On numerous occasions, including

on the election day, the alliance rejected the "farical" election, demanded fresh polls and said they would not join parliament.

But suddenly, Gonoforum MP Sultan Monsur took oath on March 7. He was subsequently expelled from the party.

The other Gonoforum MP Mokabbir Khan took oath on April 2, although the party did not expel him.

Ever since, rumours have been swirling in political circles that the BNP MPs would follow suit as part of a negotiation with the government for Khaleda's release.

A number of media outlets, including The Daily Star, have also run reports in this regard.

But in public, senior party leaders, including Fakhrul, dismissed those reports.

In the wake of Zahidur's oath, the party's Standing Committee held a series of meetings on Saturday and Sunday with its other MPs to keep them from joining the House, sources said.

On Saturday, the BNP decided to stick to its previous decision not to take oath.

Then on Sunday night, the standing committee held an emergency meeting where Tarique, who joined the meeting via video conference, sought the opinions of senior leaders on the matter, two standing committee members said.

All the standing committee members present said they were against joining parliament, but vested Tarique with all powers to make the decision, they added.

Tarique then held one-to-one to meeting with three BNP MPs -- Abdus Sattar, Harunur Rashid and Aminul Islam.

While Tarique spoke with the other BNP MP Mosharrof Hossain, there was no such discussion with Fakhrul, according to the sources.

Then on Monday noon, Tarique gave the go-ahead to join parliament, which surprised some of the standing committee members, the sources said.

"There must be some reasons behind such a sudden decision. I

think everything will be clear in a few days," said a senior leader, requesting anonymity.

'DEMOCRACY DESTROYED'

Talking to reporters after taking oath, Rashid said the current parliament was not truly representing the people.

"The present government is not elected through people's votes and there are controversies over this election," he said.

"We have come to parliament to speak the truth. The country is in crisis. This parliament has been formed through vote-rigging. The country's democratic system has been destroyed. The government will have to fix it," said Rashid.

He also said Khaleda had been sent to jail through a "dictated" verdict. She is not getting bail even though people convicted of heinous and graver crimes are out on bail.

About Zahidur's expulsion, Rashid said that Zahid offered his apology to Tarique.

"He [Zahid] told him [Tarique] that he made a mistake. He should have waited for the party decision. He has offered an apology for this. He will also offer his apology in writing. The party might consider his apology," said Rashid.

OATH UNDER PRESSURE?

On Friday, Fakhrul said they were under pressure from the government to take oath, although Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina dismissed the claim only hours later.

Yesterday, BBC Bangla and Bangla daily Prothom Alo quoted Harunur Rashid as saying that there was indeed pressure from the government.

But when asked if the BNP changed its mind under pressure from the government, Fakhrul said, "No, there was no pressure."

He then immediately went on to add: "We are under huge pressure. There is no democracy, we are barred from speaking out. Our leader is in jail. Are these not pressure from the government?"

Asked about reported negotiation with the government, he said, "Where do you find compromise? We have said that we want to place our demand inside and outside of parliament.

There is a space in parliament as of today, and that's why our lawmakers have taken oath."

On whether the BNP is giving legitimacy to this parliament, Fakhrul said, "We are not giving any legitimacy. We are using the democratic space as part of the democratic practice as well as for strategic reasons."

In politics decision may change, he noted.

FREE KHALEDA

Joining parliament, Harunur Rashid in his maiden speech demanded Khaleda's release.

"We request you [Hasina] to release our leader from jail. If you release our leader, we, the five BNP MPs who joined parliament, can at least tell the people that the prime minister freed our leader as a result of our joining parliament," he said.

Hasina was present in the House, but made no response.

"Hold the trial, but do not deprive her of the right to getting bail," he said.

He also demanded the restoration of democracy, saying that the electoral system had collapsed.

"I would like to request our leader (Sheikh Hasina) to take prompt measures to solve the present crisis in the country.... Though we're very small in number in parliament, the reality is that ...the people of the country are confined and helpless today. The democratic rights of the people have been snatched," he said.

Cops among 3 hurt

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under a tree, nearly 10 minutes after the power cut. Ashik added that he and one of the victims were resting near the tree.

He said there was a sudden blast and he found his back badly injured.

SM Bazlur Rashid, assistant commissioner of traffic, said either the crude bomb was planted on the spot or it was thrown from a distance.

"We will examine footage captured by CCTV camera installed nearby," he said.

Intensify anti-terror measures

Cabinet asks law enforcers; Ramadan office timing fixed

UNB, Dhaka

Against the backdrop of the recent series of bomb attacks in Sri Lanka, the cabinet yesterday directed the law enforcement and intelligence agencies to step up anti-terror security measures and vigilance in the country.

The directives came during the cabinet meeting, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair at her office.

"The cabinet asked for intensifying security and monitoring measures in Bangladesh," Cabinet Division Senior Secretary (coordination and reforms) Shamsul Arefin told reporters at a briefing at the secretariat.

Expressing deep sorrow at the casualties in the series bomb attacks and the death of Zayan Chowdhury, a grandson of Awami League leader Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, in one of the attacks, the cabinet adopted two condolence motions, said the senior secretary.

The cabinet expressed profound sympathy to the bereaved family members of the victims.

The meeting also approved the draft of Bangladesh Industrial and Technical Assistance Centre (BITAC) Bill, 2019 for strengthening the management and function of the

centre.

"The BITAC is a statutory body which is being run under a resolution of 1962. The bill was brought to make a full-fledged law to strengthen the management of the centre," Shamsul said.

According to the bill, there will be an 11-member BITAC board of directors, headed by the industries secretary.

The cabinet endorsed the draft of the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between Lebanon and Bangladesh for signing the deal.

The senior secretary said the meeting was also informed about the PM's recent three-day official visit to Brunei.

RAMADAN OFFICE TIMING

The cabinet also approved the office timing for the upcoming Ramadan from 9:00am to 3:30pm for all government, semi-government, autonomous and semi-autonomous institutions.

Shamsul said there would be a 15-minute break from 1:15pm to 1:30pm for Zohr prayers.

He said banks, companies and financial institutions would set their own office timing ahead of the Ramadan.

2 killed in raid

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two-storey building, and some empty plots.

Rab officials said the suspects, calling themselves Sujan and Suman, had rented a room of the house from landlord Abdul Wahab for Tk 1,500 a month around one-and-half months ago. They claimed to be rickshaw-van pullers and were supposed to vacate the room next month.

Rab said Wahab started using a room of the house as a mosque a week ago and imam of the mosque, Yusuf, used to live in another room. Sohag, the caretaker of the house, lives in a room with his wife and two children while tenant Junayed stayed in a small room.

A Rab official, who took part in the drive, said Sohag's wife opened the door when they knocked around 3:00am yesterday. The Rab personnel heard people performing jikir (devotional act in Islam in which short phrases or prayers are repeatedly recited).

When the Rab men asked the ones performing jikir to come out, they started shooting.

Sohag, his wife and children, Yusuf and Junayed were immediately evacuated, the official said requesting anonymity.

People in nearby building were also evacuated.

The elite force then fired 150 bullets at the house, the official said.

Later yesterday, crime scene unit of

Criminal Investigation Department collected evidence, including DNA samples.

Rab claimed to have recovered three pistols and four IEDs that were later diffused.

They took landlord Wahab, Sohag, his wife, and Yusuf in for questioning.

Mohammadpur police said Wahab did not submit the mandatory tenant information form to the police.

Fifty-year-old Rahima Begum could not believe two of her next-door neighbours were militant suspects. She said she visited caretaker Sohag's room Sunday evening.

"Rab men were asking us to leave the house with my three children and husband. Suddenly, I heard gunshots. We immediately hid inside and heard someone in the house shout 'fire as much as you can'," she told The Daily Star.

She said Rab personnel escorted them to safety minutes later.

Abdullah Al Mamun, resident of a nearby building, said, "I woke up to sounds of shots. As I opened the door, I saw many Rab men."

"They asked me not to come out," he said.

Many locals said they were unaware that there was a mosque in the house.

However, a local said he recently heard Azan (call for prayer) from the mosque but it was quite earlier than Azans of other mosques.

The bodies were sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Morgue for autopsy.

No mercy

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after the nearly four-hour long discussion.

In the resolution, Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad expressed its deep abhorrence and anger at the huge casualties, including the death of Zayan Chowdhury, a grandson of AL leader Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, in the terror attacks in New Zealand and Sri Lanka, and at the sexual harassment and murder of Nusrat in Feni.

In her speech, Hasina urged the people to instantly inform intelligence agencies if they know of any suspicious activities related to militancy.

Terming Nusrat a brave girl, the PM said the student didn't bow her head down to injustice and didn't agree to withdraw the sexual harassment case filed against the principal of her madrasa.

"After the incident, efforts were made

to label Nusrat as 'someone with weak character'. But she was burned to death for showing courage," said Hasina

"Some leaders of our party were involved with this principal. I instantly told the police that I don't want to see who belongs to which party and that criminals are criminals. They [the leaders] were arrested immediately. Such incidents can never be accepted," she said.

Hasina firmly said the government must take action against those involved in such incidents, irrespective of their political affiliations or views.

Awami League lawmakers Amir Hossain Amu, Meher Afroze, Opposition Chief Whip Mashhur Rahman Ranga, and Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon, among others, participated in the discussion.

No Shakib; red missing too

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a guarded approach regarding his side's chances in the showpiece event during the marathon media conference but said that: "Nothing is impossible, but it will be very important for us to handle the ups and downs."

The eventful day however raised two curious questions: Where is Shakib Al Hasan? Where is the Red?

The training and Mashrafe's press meet was followed by an auspicious occasion of unveiling Bangladesh's World Cup jersey but Shakib added

a bit of controversy by being the sole member not in the official team picture, despite being at the venue less than an hour ago.

The ace all-rounder had just returned from his stint in the Indian Premier League on Sunday and the Tigers' vice-captain only came to Mirpur to spend some time with his teammates before leaving the venue, even though he was informed that he had to take part in the photo session. After the photo session, Bangladesh Cricket

Regulator moves

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sponsors and placement shareholders will be counted from the trading day of a stock instead of the day of the issuance of prospectus.

Also, a company will not need to take approval from the regulator to raise capital through pre-IPO shares, said Saifur Rahman, executive director and spokesman for the BSEC, while briefing the media after the meeting.

In order to declare bonus shares, a company will have to explain how it will spend the money, he said.

Through IPO, a company must raise a minimum Tk 50 crore in case of face value and Tk 100 crore in case of book building method, Saifur said.

"We hope investors' confidence will return following these decisions,"

Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan said "It [Shakib's absence] is unfortunate."

The greenish jersey which was shown on the occasion also raised many eyebrows as true to their nickname, Bangladesh's World Cup kits have featured the Tiger prominently from time to time. On their debut in 1999, they had distinctive yellow-black stripes running across the front of their jerseys, while their most recent appearance in 2015 featured a giant watermark of a roaring Tiger from

their board's emblem. In between they have worn various shades of green with various yellow and red accents.

"Actually originally there was the Bangladesh name and number of the jersey in red colour on a greenish body which we sent to International Cricket Council (ICC) for approval but they didn't approve the red colours. That's why we prepared two sets of jersey; one is full green and the other is red," explained BCB media committee chairman Jalal Yunus.