

OIL SPILL INTO CANAL Admin, locals save Halda from possible disaster

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Chattogram

Efforts of the local administration and the villagers have saved the Halda river, a unique natural breeding ground for carp, from a possible disaster. Thousands of litres of furnace oil spilled into a canal, just three kilometres away from the river, as three tank wagons of a train derailed in Moddom Deyan Nagar area of Hathazari upazila on Sunday. Local administration rushed to spot soon after the incident and engaged villagers to build at least 11 makeshift dams to block the thick liquid from spreading to the river. At least 15,000 litres of furnace oil was scooped out from the water body in the last 30 hours. Meanwhile, Padma Oil Company



Railway workers scoop up furnace oil from a canal in Moddom Deyan Nagar of Chattogram's Hathazari upazila yesterday. The oil spilled into the canal on Monday after three tank wagons of a train derailed in the area, just three kilometres away from the Halda, a unique natural breeding ground for carp. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

NUSRAT KILLING Negligence of 4 cops found

STAR REPORT

The committee formed by the Police Headquarters to probe the killing of Feni madrasa student Nusrat Jahan Rafi has found four cops, including a top district police official and former Sonagazi OC Moazzem Hossain, guilty of negligence. A source close to the committee confirmed this, but refused to disclose the name of the district police official. The probe report was finalised last night and the committee is likely to submit it to the inspector general of police today, said Deputy Inspector General SM Ruhul Amin, also the head of the five-member body. The report blamed the governing committee of Sonagazi Senior Fazil Madrasa for not taking any action against Principal Siraj ud Doula despite allegations against him of sexually assaulting students, said the DIG. The source also said the report mentioned about the allegation of Nusrat's mother Shirin Akhter that she along with her son and Nusrat went to the office of Feni Additional District Magistrate PKM Enamul Karim on April 4 after filing a sexual harassment case against the principal on March 27. The magistrate expressed unwillingness to listen to them and warned them that they might have to face a defamation suit. Contacted last night, Enamul, who was the president of the madrasa governing committee, said he rather thanked Nusrat's family members for filing the case. "I asked them to fight the legal battle sincerely. I do not understand how such allegations against me are being made," he said.

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4 killed in 'gunfights'

STAR REPORT

Two alleged criminals, including a drug peddler, were killed in "gunfights" with law enforcers in Chapainawabganj and Madaripur, while two suspected robbers were killed in what police claimed was a fighting between two groups of robbers in Cox's Bazar yesterday. In Chapainawabganj, an alleged criminal was killed in a "shootout" with police in Pulpara area of Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon. The deceased was Bagha alias Babu, 38, of Chunakhali village of the upazila. Ziaur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station, said police arrested Bagha from his home in Chunakhali village around 4:00pm. Later, police, along with Bagha, conducted a drive to arrest his other accomplices in Pulpara area. At that time, Bagha's accomplices attacked police with sharp weapons and also opened fire. Police then returned fire. Bagha was trying to flee police custody and was hit by bullets, while others fled, the OC said. Bagha was taken to Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital. As his condition deteriorated, he was referred to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital where he died around 6:45pm. Police claimed to have recovered a pistol, a magazine, two bullets and four sharp weapons from the spot. Bagha stood accused in 19 cases, including murder, said the OC. In Madaripur, a suspected drug peddler was killed in a similar incident with Rab at Char Airkandi in Kalkini upazila. The deceased is Jahirul Islam alias Jokka, 40, of Kayariya village in the upazila. Debashish Karmaker, company commander of Madaripur Rab, said

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72pc rail engines on deathbed

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"If the situation and laws permit, we will hire 20 locomotives from India for two years," Mofazzel Hossain, secretary at the railways ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday. Bangladesh has never hired any locomotive from any country before. Seventy new locomotives -- 30 metre gauge (MG) and 40 broad gauge (BG) -- will start arriving from the US and South Korea late next year, Mofazzel said. "We want to hire 20 locomotives for this interim period." He further said they would place a proposal to this effect through the foreign ministry at the next foreign secretary-level meeting between Bangladesh and India. The meeting is supposed to be held in the first week of this month but it may be deferred as the prime minister will be abroad at that time, said diplomatic sources. Mofazzel said they will also raise the issue at the next periodical meeting between railway officials of the two countries. "We will try our best to get the locomotives [from India] as soon as possible," he said. According to the BR, it has 178 MG locomotives, of which 139 have crossed their 20-year economic life. And of its 90 BG locomotives, 55 have crossed economic life. "We have sent the proposal [to the ministry] to overcome a crisis situation," Md Shamsuzzaman, additional director general (rolling stock) of the BR, told this newspaper on Monday. He mentioned that they suggested hiring 10 MG and as many BG locomotives. The terms and conditions in this regard have not been settled yet, the railway official said. At a meeting on May 28, top officials of the ministry and the BR

discussed the proposal. At the meeting, the ministry officials wanted to know from the BR high-ups whether the railways had hired locomotives from any country before Bangladesh's independence or whether India ever rented out locomotives to any country, said sources. As no one could come up with any answers, the meeting decided to take the help of the foreign ministry, they mentioned. POOR SHOW Though the government bought carriages and spent money to expand the rail network in recent times, it did not procure any locomotives since fiscal 2013-14, a railway official said seeking anonymity. In that fiscal year, 11 MG locomotives were procured, the official said. The BR had 486 locomotives in fiscal 1969-70 but the number has now come down to 268 "due to failure of the policy makers," added the official. In March this year, the BR inked a deal with Hyundai Rotem Company, a Korean firm, to buy 20 new MG locomotives for Tk 674.09 crore. The company has to deliver the engines within 22-28 months. Earlier in May last year, the BR signed another deal with Hyundai to get 10 new MG locomotives for Tk 297.63 crore within 24 months. In January this year, the BR struck a deal with US-based Progress Rail for purchasing 40 new BG locomotives, which will be delivered within 24-36 months for Tk 1,123 crore. The process of adding 70 more MG locomotives to the fleet is underway and the date of their delivery will be decided after completion of loan negotiations. The immediate need would be met with the arrival of 140 locomotives but more engines have to be bought gradually, added the official. Transport expert Prof Shamsul

Haque said the railway sector had long been deprived of investment. But when the government started investing in the sector, more focus was given on developing infrastructure, including railway tracks and stations, instead of procuring locomotives and creating skilled manpower. It takes a considerable time to purchase locomotives and create skilled manpower, which are two key elements of the railway sector. But these two things have been overlooked all along, he said. "Undertaking projects without proper need-based assessment is the reason behind this crisis," Shamsul, former director of Buet's Accident Research Institute, told this newspaper yesterday. He said the authorities could decide to hire locomotives to cope with the crisis. But it appears odd that the government considers hiring locomotives while it is investing thousands of crore of taka in building infrastructure. Atiqur Rahman, project officer of Work for a Better Bangladesh Trust, said the successive governments' indifference to the railways and a lack of coordination inside the BR are the major reasons behind the crisis. Currently, 363 trains are being run by 268 locomotives. And the crisis of locomotives is nothing new, but the previous governments ignored it, said Atiqur, who has experience of over eight years in the sector. More than a hundred locomotives have been running for over 40 years, which has resulted in a fall in speed of trains. This also increased risk of accidents, Atiqur said. Amid such a situation, hiring of only 20 locomotives would not give much relief. Rather, the government should take immediate steps to overhaul the old locomotives instead of hiring railway engines from India, he added.

Fakhrul's seat falls vacant

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vacant," said the speaker. Shirin said she informed the House as per section 178 (3) of the parliament's rules of procedure. The 11th parliament, formed through the December 30 general election, held its maiden session on January 30, 2019. According to article 67 of the constitution, a member of parliament shall vacate his seat if he

fails to take oath, or affirm to do so, within 90 days from the date of the first meeting of parliament after his election. "Provided that the speaker may, before the expiration of that period, for good cause extend it," said the same article of the constitution. Some media outlets have recently reported that Fakhrul had written to the speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, seeking an extension of time for

his oath-taking due to health complications. However, Fakhrul yesterday trashed those reports, reaffirming that he will not take oath as a member of the 11th parliament to uphold his party's decision. "It's a blatant lie. I did not send any letter or seek any time for my oath," he said. Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary also denied receiving any such letter.

Cops verifying IS claim

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Hours into the explosion, SITE Intelligence Group, an American company that tracks online activity of white supremacist and jihadist organisations, said the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. "For the first time in over two years, the IS claimed credit for an attack in Bangladesh, bombing policemen in the capital, Dhaka," the organisation added. Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia said the anti-terrorism experts of the CTTC unit were analysing the credibility of the IS claim. "We are also checking the claim using our cyber crime team and we can only say something about it after investigation," said the DMP chief. He came up with the statement while talking to reporters after visiting the injured policemen at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). Asked about the bomb, the DMP boss said it was slightly different from regular crude bombs. "Our bomb disposal unit and CTTC officials have already visited the spot and collected evidence, and analysed the injuries. "We are analysing every possible detail and action will be taken against those responsible," added the DMP

boss. Bangladesh is not out of the sphere of influence of worldwide global extremism efforts but local militant groups had no capacity to conduct any large and organised violence here, he said. Meanwhile, a sub-inspector of Paltan Police Station filed a case in connection with the blast against some unidentified people under the Explosive Substances Act, said Shiblee Noman, additional deputy commissioner of DMP (Motijheel zone). No one was arrested till filing of this report yesterday night. A police high official investigating the case told this newspaper that they were not able to collect the evidence properly as it was damaged by locals before they reached the spot. "We tried to collect the Close Circuit Television Camera footage but did not find any that directly covered the spot. There was a camera on the spot but it was found damaged," the official said, requesting anonymity. The bomb exploded five minutes after traffic constables sat on the spot to take rest. This was around five minutes after the electricity in the area went out, said locals and investigators. While visiting the spot yesterday, this correspondent saw the hole created

by the blast and the damage it did to nearby trees. The two traffic constables injured in the explosion -- Nazrul Islam, 45, and Mohammad Liton, 42, -- were shifted to Rajarbagh Police Line from DMCH, said the inspector of DMCH police outpost. Meanwhile, five to six unknown people were made accused in a case filed in connection with the raid that left two suspected militants dead in the capital's Bosila yesterday. Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) filed the case with Mohammadpur Police Station early yesterday against the two dead "militants" and three to four unknown people, said Rab-2 Commanding Officer Ashique Billah. The suspected militants were killed after they allegedly detonated an improvised explosive device in a house in the area during the raid. "The two dead are still unidentified and we are trying to identify them using DNA tests. We have already sent samples to the DNA laboratory of Criminal Investigation Department," Billah said. They were not able to collect fingerprints as the fingers of the dead were completely burnt, he added. "We are investigating the case and trying to trace the other associates."

Justice delayed

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a handsome amount of money and repeatedly ask for leave from present employers who did not take that positively. "This is a terrible experience but I am still waiting for justice," he said on Monday. Sufferings of many workers like Sanowar linger as the seven labour courts and the Labour Appellate Tribunal had 17,600 cases pending as of last month, official sources say. According to lawyers and labour leaders, such a small number of courts, one after another time petitions filed by lawyers specially representing owners, frequent absence of members of labour courts cause unnecessary delay in disposal of the cases. The labour court members mostly remain busy with their main jobs, said at least two lawyers. A labour court consists of a chairman and two members -- one representing the worker and the other representing the employer. The chairman, who is a judge, picks the two members to constitute the court for the purpose of hearing an industrial dispute or a dispute relating to the service/employment of the workers. No appointment to the post of chairman at the Labour Appellate Tribunal for over one and a half months, and to the posts of registrar at Dhaka second and third labour courts, Chittagong first and second courts and the lone court in Khulna for two to over six months has made the situation worse. Court officials say some of the cases have been pending for 10 years even though the labour law requires all cases to be disposed of in 60 days. If the cases are not disposed within 60 days, the court can extend the deadline for another 90 days showing a valid reason. One of the problems relating to the cases is "the law does not specifically say what would happen if the case is not resolved within the stipulated time," said a member of a labour court in Dhaka. Registrar Adhir Chandra Bala of the appellate tribunal claimed that the rate of case disposal in recent months is higher than that of case filing. The backlog is a result of pending cases from the past, he said. Replying to a query, he said the posts of registrar often fall vacant as many quit after finding better opportunities while the post of chairman of Labour Appellate Tribunal is contractual. Currently, three out of the seven labour courts are based in Dhaka, two in Chittagong and one each in Rajshahi and Khulna. The Labour Appellate Tribunal is also based in Dhaka. The registrar's office of the Labour Appellate Tribunal keeps record of pending cases only in three categories

-- over one month, over three and over six months. So, if a case is pending for more than one year, it remains in the category for over six months. Of all the cases, 10,838 are pending for over six months, 3,495 for more than three months and 3,275 for more than one month, according to the registrar's office. A total of 1,047 cases are pending with the appellate tribunal, 4,576 with the Dhaka first court, 5,263 with the Dhaka second court, 4,005 cases with the Dhaka third court, 1,510 with the Chattogram first court, 578 with the Chattogram second court, 214 with the Khulna court and 415 cases with the Rajshahi court. "We are creating a database for all the pending cases for quick disposal of those," said Ummul Hasna, secretary-in-charge of Ministry of Labour and Employment. To ease the huge backlog, the ministry has taken an initiative to set up three new labour courts in Sylhet, Barisal and Rangpur, she added. Tribunal Registrar Adhir said the three new courts will start work by July next year. Most of the pending cases relate to disputes arising out of layoffs, dismissals, retrenchments, non-payment and delayed payment of wages and other benefits, compensation for workplace injuries and violation of trade union rights. The number of labour courts has not increased since 1970 despite the huge increase in employment in the country. Labour leaders mentioned that the courts are situated in divisional headquarters. So a worker in Sylhet has to go to the Labour Court of Chittagong to file cases or a worker in Barisal has to go to Khulna for seeking justice. "This delay in disposal of cases costs a complainant additional money," said Razekezzaman Ratan, a leader of Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop), the country's top body of trade unions. A worker needs a day's leave from the employer to attend a hearing in a labour court, which creates problems for his or her in the work place, he added. "In most cases, owners' lawyers file unnecessary time petitions repeatedly, which delays the decisions of the courts and lingers the case" said Ratan, a member of Dhaka second court. At least three lawyers practising at the labour courts said frequent absence of members cause unnecessary delay in disposing of the cases. Labour Court Bar Association General Secretary Rafiqul Islam said it takes time to start a case proceeding because of formalities and that's one of the reasons behind the backlog. Rafiqul Islam said generally a court takes 18 to 24 months to dispose of a case.

No tax hike

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The size of the national budget for 2019-20 would be more than Tk 5 lakh crore, and taxmen would be given the target of Tk 3.25 lakh crore. Kamal said he would try to bring "something new" in his budget proposals. The next budget would not be a budget for one single year. Rather, it would lay the foundation for budgets for successive fiscal years till 2041, he said. The budget would be prepared in such a way that everybody would be able to understand it clearly, he added. He further said like the previous years, no statutory regulatory orders (SRO) would be issued after the passage of the budget. "We will give incentives to all export items," he said, adding that real estate sector would also be given priority in the next fiscal year's budget. On the hassles to get cash incentives against exports, he said the incentives would be handed over in two weeks after filing of applications. But exporters would require providing bank guarantee for it, he said. "My first task will be to save people from harassments," the minister said, adding that he would act to stop various irregularities, including all types of bribery, to ensure better services to the people. Kamal further said his office would have a special number dedicated to re-ceiving complaints of harassments and wrongdoing by officials. Action will be taken in seven days if anyone is found guilty, he added. Kamal said he wanted the FBCCI to take action against dishonest and non-compliant businessmen. Citing records of goods imports through false declaration, he suggested the trade body cancels membership of the businessmen at fault. Salman F Rahman, prime minister's adviser on private sector, and FBCCI President Shafiqul Islam Mohiuddin also spoke at the meeting chaired by NBR Chairman Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan.

the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), at the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre. "Taxes will not go up by a single Taka. The existing rates would either continue or reduced. New taxpayers would be given attention so that no one has to face any hassle," he said. The minister had made similar comments while speaking at a press briefing at the planning ministry on April 2. On that day, he said although the government has no plan to increase taxes, it intends to bring more people under the tax net. "We have a lot of scope for widening the tax net. We will use this opportunity," he had mentioned. Currently, the ceiling of individual tax-free income in the country is Tk 2.50 lakh for a year. The national budget is placed in parliament in the first week of June every year. Yesterday, Kamal also hinted that exporters would be given incentives and steps would be taken to initiate reforms to areas like customs, Value Added Tax (Vat) and banking. "You will see a lot of reforms in different areas." At the meeting, the FBCCI urged for increasing tax free income limit for individual taxpayers; 2.5 percentage points cut in corporate tax; removal of ad-vance income tax on imports; increased incentives for exports; hike in sur-charge-free net wealth threshold; multiple rates of Vat; and reducing import tariff on basic raw materials and chemicals to three percent for the fiscal 2019-20 from five percent in the outgoing fiscal year. The apex trade body also demanded the government take steps to bring down the amount of non-performing loans and bring an end to lending on po-litical consideration. Besides, it called for taking actions against the willful loan defaulters. This budget is going to be the first budget for Kamal as the finance minister. Previously, he headed the planning ministry for five years.