

Bandh Paralyzes Life In Assam: Engine Derailed

GAUHATI, Nov. 20.—Industrial, commercial and civic life was paralysed in most of Assam during the 36-hour bandh which ended this evening, reports P.T.I. Barring a few stray incidents, the bandh was peaceful on the second day today.

An engine was derailed this morning near Chabua station, 60 km east of Dibrugarh town, because of removal of fish-plates, according to N.F. Railway officials.

The fish-plates were found missing between Chabua and Hatiali stations, on the Dibrugarh-Tinsukia metre gauge section.

Elsewhere in Nowgong district, a part of the rails on the track between Bebejia and Phularuri stations was found removed. This resulted in traffic dislocation between Chaparmukh and Nowgong stations, on the Chaparmukh-Silghat metre gauge branch line section, the officials said. Both the incidents are suspected to be cases of sabotage, the sources added.

At least 10 people, including three policemen were injured in a clash with a mob in front of the sub-divisional office at Kamalabari in Sibsagar district today, according to official reports here.

The reports said a 500 strong crowd picketed the SDO's office to prevent the entry of the employees.

The police used lathis and tear-gas shells to disperse the picketeers.

Mr R. V. Subramanian, Adviser to the Governor of Assam, tonight claimed that the administration was able to maintain all essential services with minimal inconvenience to the public during the bandh.

According to him, the bandh itself was by and large peaceful despite a few cases of attempted sabotage and some instances of assaults on Government employees.

Four people have been arrested in connexion with assault on Government servants.

In all 1,000 people had been taken into preventive custody on the eve of the bandh and they would be released soon, he said.

The Assam Public Service Commission examinations and preliminary examinations for Indian Civil Service here continued uninterrupted.

The Government has directed the deputy commissioner, Nowgong, to seek explanations from the employees for absence during the bandh days.

The State Chief Secretary, Mr Ramesh Chandra, said the Government was planning to take action in the light of its previous announcement against all the employees who did not turn up for their duties.

The Government has announced an ex gratia payment of Rs 5,000 to the family of the person killed in the police firing at Dhing town

in Nowgong district yesterday. AASU today congratulated the people of Assam on "responding to the 36-hour bandh call with determination, ignoring the threats of the Government"

In a statement, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Mr Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, president and general secretary of AASU, respectively, said it was the "duty" of every Indian residing in Assam to support the demand for early solution to the foreigners problem as it was faced by not only students but also the entire people of the State.

AASU has called for observance of a "mourning day" throughout the State on November 23 in protest against the "killing" of a person in the police firing at Dhing.

AASU said it would have to think for an alternative to its "non-violent movement" to face the Government which "believes only in bullets and lathis"

Representatives of various trade associations of Greater Gauhati have given a call for closure of all shops and business establishments, including transport operators in Greater Gauhati tomorrow in protest against the arrest of four prominent business men of Gauhati and their expulsion from Kamrup on the eve of the bandh.

The Hill State People's Democratic Party today urged the Centre to find a solution to the foreign nationals' issue in Assam and Meghalaya to avoid bandh and other agitations "which adversely affect the economy and people in the North-East."

In a press release in Shillong, the party's central executive expressed concern over the "tardy progress" in finding a solution to the problem.

In Dhing, the curfew was relaxed for four hours today since no untoward incidents were reported from anywhere, adds UNI.

Meanwhile, the troops staged a flag march in the curfew-bound town and its adjoining areas. The situation there was quiet but still tense, official reports received here said.

A bomb exploded in the compound of a railway employee at Maligaon here this morning. No one was injured. Two unexploded bombs were detected on the railway track near Kamakhya station yesterday.

In New Delhi, Mrs Gandhi said today that Assam agitationists were overlooking national interests by resuming their action programme. The Prime Minister held the Opposition responsible for the worsening of the situation in Assam.

Asked when a final remedy could be found for the Assam problem, she observed there was no final or temporary remedy for it.

Mrs Gandhi was speaking to a group of journalism students of NMKRV College for Women from Bangalore who, called on her.

Mrs Gandhi accused AASU and the AAGSP, sponsors of the agitation, of going back on certain matters on which they had concurred with the Government during the talks in Delhi.

She felt that Government servants in Assam were not cooperating with the administration there hampering work and development programmes.

On the Khalistan issue, Mrs Gandhi reiterated that this was anti-national. The Khalistan issue was more abroad than within this country, she added.

On the supply of sophisticated arms to Pakistan, Mrs Gandhi said the threat to peace and tranquility in the Indian sub-continent was not imaginary but real. "It is a real fear."

She described the recently North-South summit at Cancun as an important step in the efforts for co-operation between the developed and developing countries.

"No meeting is a waste. The fact that such meeting was held is important and the doors have opened." She said only the future could tell the impact of the Cancun summit.

In reply to a question, Mrs Gandhi said many newspapers were "politically-motivated" and were against the Congress (I). They could write plenty about India's achievements and development activities but were content with sensationalism.

About India's foreign policy, the Prime Minister said it was being appreciated the world over and it boosted India's prestige in the international comity of nations.

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