

# Gunman opens fire on anti-CAA demo in Delhi

One student hurt

AFP, New Delhi

A suspected Hindu nationalist yesterday live-streamed himself minutes before opening fire on university students protesting against India's new citizenship law in Delhi.

One student was reportedly shot in the hand before police arrested the alleged gunman, who timed his attack to coincide with the anniversary of the assassination of independence hero Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 by a Hindu radical.

Video circulating on social media showed the man brandishing a handgun and confronting protesters while shouting "Yeh lo azadi" ("Here is your freedom") and "Long live Delhi police".

In the background, dozens of police can be seen watching proceedings.

The highly charged word "azadi" was previously associated with Kashmiri separatists, but has been used widely in the past more than a month of protests against the citizenship law.

The law makes it easier for persecuted religious minorities from three neighbouring countries to get

Indian citizenship, but not if they are Muslim.

Critics say this forms part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's master plan to remould India as a purely Hindu nation, marginalising its 200 million Muslims, something Modi denies.

Before yesterday's incident, the alleged gunman went live on Facebook as he walked around the protest area.

"On my last journey, take me draped in saffron and shout slogans of Hail Lord Ram," one post on his page read -- a popular chant for Hindu nationalists.

Saffron is a colour associated with Hinduism -- and with Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party -- while Ram is an important deity.

"Shaheen Bagh, Game Over," read another, referring to massive protests against the citizenship law taken up by women and children in the Indian capital.

Afterward the shooting several thousand people gathered at the site, an AFP reporter said.

Some pushed against barriers, and police responded with water cannon, media reports said.

# Candidates trade blame

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Bhasantek slum, alleged that his opponent was trying to bring outsiders into Dhaka to foil the voting atmosphere.

"I want to say no evil forces can stop the mass upsurge," he said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, speaking during a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters, alleged that the AL was bringing in criminals from outside the city to create terror and that voters were threatened and discouraged to go to polling centres.

He also alleged that police were raiding the councillors' houses and arresting them to create panic.

AL candidate for Dhaka South City Corporation Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh alleged that there was a conspiracy to occupy 170 centres in the city corporation areas to influence the mayoral race.

While campaigning at Gopibagh, he requested the Election Commission and law enforcement agencies to take necessary steps to maintain a congenial atmosphere conducive to fair voting on election day.

However, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told journalists that the law and order situation was under control and there was no risk.

BNP's mayoral candidates said they have enough manpower to appoint polling agents and if law enforcers do not obstruct, agents will be at the polling stations on time.

They said unlike the last city polls, they will stay in the battle till the end.

The AL said they would guard polling centres on election day to thwart any unwanted incidents

while the BNP urged voters to guard the polling stations till the vote counting would end.

Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda told journalists that 75 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were deployed in the capital yesterday ahead of the February 1 polls.

Shariful Islam, public relations officer of BGB headquarters, said 65 platoons would work in the field while 10 other platoons will be kept as reserves.

The prevailing atmosphere has voters wondering whether they would be able to cast their votes.

"In the last parliamentary election, I could not cast my vote. Only if the situation is calm I will think of casting my vote," Akram Hossain, a private service holder from Jigatola, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Election Commission will employ EVMs as the sole voting method for the first time, a move that has been opposed by all mayoral candidates except the ruling party contenders.

## VEHICLE MOVEMENT RESTRICTED

Meanwhile, the EC imposed a 54-hour ban on the movement of motorcycles in the capital, which came into effect from midnight yesterday. The restriction will remain in place until Sunday morning.

For 18 hours from midnight on January 31 to 6:00pm on February 1, the movement of motorised vehicles have also been restricted in election areas.

Motorcycles and vehicles with EC stickers, vehicles of emergency services, including ambulance, fire service and postal department, will be out of the ban's purview.

# Coronavirus cases

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China, killing about 800 people and costing the global economy an estimated \$33 billion, or 0.1% of world GDP, in 2003.

Economists fear the impact on global growth could be bigger this time as China now accounts for a larger share of the world economy. One Chinese economist has forecast the crisis would lop a percentage point off China's first-quarter growth.

Global stocks tumbled yesterday, while the yuan hit its lowest this year, oil prices slid again and safe haven assets like gold gained.

Almost all the deaths have been in Hubei province - of which Wuhan is the capital - where 60 million people are now living under virtual lockdown, only venturing outside with masks.

Australia, South Korea, Singapore, New Zealand and Indonesia were quarantining evacuees for at least two weeks, though the United States and Japan planned shorter, voluntary isolation.

Three Japanese, from 206 evacuated on Wednesday, were infected, and worryingly two of them had not shown symptoms, Tokyo said. A second Japanese flight included nine people showing fever or coughing symptoms, broadcaster NHK said.

India was the latest nation to report a case, a student of Wuhan University. And South Koreans protested at facilities earmarked as quarantine centres, throwing eggs at a minister.

According to one of the latest studies yet published on the deadly epidemic, the period between exposure to the new coronavirus and symptoms is 5.2 days on average, but varies greatly among patients.

While admitting that the estimate is "imprecise," the Chinese team behind a paper published in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) on Wednesday said their findings support a 14-day medical observation period for people exposed to the pathogen.

And an Italian cruise ship's 6,000 passengers were kept on board while tests were held on two Chinese travellers.

The crisis has stoked a wave of anti-China sentiment around the globe, from shops barring tourists to online mockery.

In the corporate world, Alphabet Inc's Google and Sweden's IKEA were the latest big names to close China operations. South Korea's Samsung Electronics extended holiday closure for some Chinese production facilities.

Airlines to suspend flights to mainland China include Lufthansa, Air Canada, American Airlines and British Airways. Air France cabin crew unions were demanding the same, sources said, though the company has already allowed pilots and crew to opt out of China flights.

Fuelling concern over damage to productivity, thousands of Chinese factory workers on Lunar New Year holidays may struggle to get back to work next week, due to travel restrictions.

Policymakers are anxious, with China dominating US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's news conference on Wednesday. "China's economy is very important in the global economy now, and when China's economy slows down we do feel that," he said.

Streets in many Chinese cities were largely deserted and tourist attractions shut. Starbucks coffee shops were requiring temperature checks and masks.

Cases of human-to-human transmission outside China are of particular concern to medics, but it is too early to determine how lethal the coronavirus is, as there are likely to be many cases of milder infections going undetected.

It has an incubation time of between one and 14 days.

With local officials facing a backlash from China's public, especially over their early response, the health chief of Huanggang city - also in Hubei province, with a population of 7.5 million - was dismissed, authorities said.

No explanation was given.



The squeaky clean Gulshan avenue, left, is in sharp contrast to almost inaccessible Badda high School Road, which is not far from Gulshan. The authorities, obviously do not give the same attention to all the areas in the city corporations.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# Attention not same for all

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storm drainage, parks and playgrounds.

But whether the corporations would focus on just the main arteries and its immediate connecting roads, or give the facelift to the entire area apparently depends on the average income of the people living there, documents suggest.

Areas in Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara were shaped up under a Tk 70 crore project since 2015-2016. City corporation officials call it late mayor Annisul Huq's capstone project and a model to be imitated in other city areas.

Uttara residential area has got a similar treatment for Tk 85.9 crores, since 2015, shows documents of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC).

Even though Khilkhet is situated near the city's main thoroughfares, such development work never seemed a priority.

As per DNCC budget documents, the area stretches over 15sqkm but facelift work is going on on three roads.

A quick scan of the real estate websites suggests property prices in Uttara and Gulshan are approximately three and five times higher than that of Khilkhet.

Mirpur is another area where the DNCC spent money on such work even though the area isn't stereotypically well-off.

Mirpur is a vast area consisting of seven wards, and flat prices varying from Tk 19 lakh to Tk 2 crore.

City corporation officials, however, say that road improvements were done there keeping in mind it will be the starting point of the first metro rail line, making it one of the best connected areas in the city in the near future.

"The entirety of the locality got a thorough facelift worth around Tk 700 crores, with nearly all roads covered, and no stone left unturned. We worked on building sidewalks and drains, in addition to roads," stated Faruk Hasan Md Al Masud, deputy project director of an infrastructure project.

This makes Mirpur the area where the DNCC spent the most money.

Overall, the DNCC has undertaken over a thousand crores' worth of government-funded projects to improve city streets. A majority of this went into Mirpur and adjacent areas, Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, and Uttara, leaving a minor share for Rampura, Khilkhet, Joar Sahara, Kalachandpur, Jagannathpur, Kawran Bazar, Mohammadpur, Kafrul, and Shyamoli.

Many DNCC areas were left out altogether.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) has not undertaken any projects on the same scale as the DNCC. Their total expenditure comes to an approximate figure of Tk 300 crores over the last five years, according to budget documents.

DSCC officials refused to confirm the exact figure, despite repeated attempts by this correspondent.

"The city corporation worked on roads in Doyaganj, and are currently repairing sidewalks, drains, and roads in Shahjahanpur, Banasree, Meradia, Lalbagh, Kamrangirchar, and Shahidnagar," said DSCC's public relations officer, Uttam Kumar Roy.

## SOME MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

In addition to fixing the roads, the DNCC is also working to upgrade 20 parks and playgrounds. Nine of these are in Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara areas.

The rest are near Town Hall, Tajmahal Road, Humayun Road and Iqbal Road in Mohammadpur areas, and one each from Rayerbazar, Shyamoli, Moghbazar and Kawran Bazar areas.

This still deprives the residents in DNCC areas of new and improved parks. In fact, the city corporation does not hold data on what other parks and public spaces there are out there, officials said.

By DNCC's own statistics, only 25 percent of its households are in areas where these new parks are located, or in areas adjacent to the parks.

"We had asked the respective owners of parks [like housing societies] to hand over the parks to us. Those that were handed over, we worked on them," said Tariq Bin Yusuf, executive engineer of a

project.

Once completed, the parks promise to be delightful places. As Yusuf explained, "The parks are being fitted with lit walkways so that they are safe at night, children's zones, security cameras, canteens, public toilets, and more." Gulshan Central Park, for example, will have a beautiful lake surrounded by a promenade, and floating platforms.

"We hope to take a look at public spaces in Mirpur in the upcoming years," said Yusuf.

The city corporations have also taken up projects to develop the 36 wards newly added. There are 129 wards under the two city corporations.

## EXPERTS' TAKE

Sultan Hafeez Rahman, eminent governance expert and former executive director of Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), sees the risk of interference by local-level elites as a barrier to general development processes.

"The appearance of elite influence is pervasive in decision-making processes, which may explain why certain areas are given priority over others," he stated.

"Given the limitation of resources, the city corporation must prioritise. It also makes sense because Dhaka needs development. The question is, how and where would you begin? It is difficult to understand why certain residential neighbourhoods are being chosen over others."

Ward meetings between the councilors and constituents need to happen, and in a structured, active manner, he added.

Adil Mohammad Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, reiterated the same view, adding that development expenditure should truly reflect the relative needs of a ward.

"There is a discrepancy in how long it takes for a road in a high-income neighbourhood to get fixed compared to one in a low-income neighbourhood," he stated.

The Daily Star repeatedly tried to contact the CEOs of the city corporations for comments on the spending, but they did not respond to phone calls and text messages.

# Poor show

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about 3:00pm.

DNCC Returning Officer Abul Kashem said the turnout was very low because it was a workday.

Replying to a query, he said, "Most of the Dhaka citizens are educated. They will easily be able to cast their votes."

## DNCC

A correspondent of this newspaper found that 48 polling officials were waiting for voters at the Sher-E-Bangla Nagar Government Girls' High School, which had four polling centres.

All polling officials refused to talk with this journalist when he asked why people were not showing up.

At the Government Music College, which had two polling centres, no voters came to centre number 889 while only one turned up to cast a vote, till 2:30pm. There were about 20 polling officials present at the school.

No voters went to Dhaka YMCA School, which has two polling centres.

## DSCC

At the three polling centres in City College, no one turned up to vote till 1:30pm.

"We were expecting voters, but nobody has come as of now," Ariful Islam, presiding officer of the centre number 269, said. Most of the polling officials were seen sitting together and chitchatting.

During the visit, it was found that seven voters cast votes in centre 76 at Basabo Girls High School. Three turned up to cast votes at centre 77 and two voters voted at centre 78 -- all housed in the same school building.

No voters turned out at centre numbers 79 and 75 at the school.

Asked why there were so few voters, Md Nasir Uddin, presiding officer of centre 76, said: "There was huge advertisement of mob voting... I don't know why people are not coming. But the voting will continue till 7:00pm."

# 341 stranded

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"Ashkona is our primary option. If we need, we will also prepare Kuwait-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital.

"The foreign ministry is coordinating everything. We are now taking preparation to receive them safely," said Prof Flora.

An inter-ministerial meeting is scheduled to be held this morning at the airport.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque will brief the media after the meeting.

Earlier in the day, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said the Chinese government would bear the medical cost of Bangladeshis if they get infected with the coronavirus in China.

Until yesterday, 370 Bangladeshis in Wuhan city have agreed to return to Bangladesh, he told reporters after attending the closing ceremony of the Bangladesh Development Forum at the city's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

However, 15 other Bangladeshis said it won't be good for the country if they were infected by the virus and returned home.

"There might be some more who would like to come home. We will repatriate them as soon as the Chinese authorities allow. They are now in quarantine," Momen said.

China has informed Bangladesh that it won't allow the Bangladeshis to leave before February 6, when two weeks of quarantine expires.

He said Bangladesh has commercial planes with 419 seats, and those can be sent to China to bring back the Bangladeshis.

Asked if there were any plans for imposing a travel ban, he said there was no such plan.

So far, no Bangladeshi has been infected with the coronavirus.

If anybody is found having symptoms, they would be kept under special observation at hospitals, and the health ministry has already made the arrangements, he said.