

15 hurt as BCL attacks JCD procession in Netrakona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

At least 15 people were injured when ruling Awami League-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) attacked a torch procession of BNP's student wing Jatiyatubadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) at 7 pm in Barobazar area in Netrakona town on Saturday.

The BCL activists attacked the procession with sharpened weapons when it reached near Barobazar. The JCD men brought out the procession from the party office to drum up support for the 60-hour country-wide general strike that began Sunday morning.

District unit president of JCD Jahangir Alam Masud, whose two fingers were severed, was sent to Orthopaedics Hospital in Dhaka in critical condition.

Later the gang of robbers left the train with booty by pulling the chain near Shamsenagar Air Port.

One dies as robbers raid train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A train passenger was killed and at least seven others were injured when some 20 robbers raided a compartment of a train at the outer signal of Tilagang station on Thursday night.

According to Kulara railway police, the robbers, who boarded the Dhaka-bound 10 down Surma Mail in the guise of passengers, started attack at 11 pm.

Later the gang of robbers left the train with booty by pulling the chain near Shamsenagar Air Port.

Release of JCD GS demanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi city unit of All Party Students Unity (APSU) took out a stick procession and held a rally on Thursday in Rajshahi city demanding release of JCD General Secretary Shahabuddin Laltu and Islamic Chhatra Shibir leader Mobinul Islam.

The procession carrying sticks paraded main thoroughfares in the city chanting various slogans against the arrests. Later they held a meeting at Sonadighi intersection with the APSU city unit President Mijanur Rahman Khokon in the chair.

Cargo handling of 2 foreign ships suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Cargo handling of two foreign ships anchored at Chittagong port remained suspended due to some dockers' refusal to attend gang booking.

Workers have stayed away from gang booking for the two vessels, MV Hanjir Istanbul and MV Shaktar, since Tuesday morning to protest against the berthing of a ship at the CUFJ jetty, said port sources.

The sources added that the departure of the two ships would be delayed, if the stalemate continues.

Locals decry Sirajganj FEMA

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Local people, including political leaders, have criticised Sirajganj district unit of FEMA (Fair Election Monitoring Alliance), saying the chief of the unit is a 'corrupt' person.

Many people in the district said neutral and respectable people should be inducted into the committee of the organisation. Otherwise, confidence of common people in the organisation will fade, they added.

Shafina Lohani, who also heads a local NGO, is the chief of Sirajganj FEMA. There is allegation that Shafina Lohani misappropriated huge amount of money allocated for the NGO she is working with.

A reliable source said she misappropriated several lakhs of taka sanctioned for four fishery projects in Sirajganj district. It is learnt that the donor concerned in a letter issued on November 14, 2000 asked her to pay back some nine lakh taka earlier sanctioned for Belkuchi and Ullapara projects as no work has been done.

It is also alleged that the other activities of her NGO, Sirajganj Uttar Mahila Sangstha, are facing setback due to her corruption.

But when contacted, Shafina Lohani, who also heads Sirajganj NGO Forum, apex body of local NGOs, denied the allegation.

Local leaders, including TMA Mannan MP and Mokaddes Ali of BNP, Abu Yusuf Surjo of Awami League, Abdul Hai and Gazi Faruk Ahmed of Jatiya Party and Moulana Ali Alam of Jamaat-e-Islami, demanded the existing FEMA committee be abolished immediately. They are of the opinion that fresh committee should be formed with honest and impartial people.

Other officials of the committee are Anisur Rahman, Fazlul Matin Mukta, Zahangir Alam Raton, Nurul Islam Babu, Imtiaz Ali Kumkum, Helal Ahmed, Mozibur Rahman, Selim Jahangir, Alauddin Khan Alal, and Lokman Hakim.

When contacted, Fazlul Matin Mukta, Imtiaz Ali Kumkum, Selim Jahangir, Alauddin Khan Alal, and Lokman Hakim told this correspondent that they were not aware when they were put on the committee in 1999.

Abdul Matin Mukta himself said the existing committee should be dissolved. People who represent civil society should be inducted into the new committee, he added.

During deposed President Ershad's regime Shafina Lohani was member of Sirajganj District Council. It is alleged that she and her husband, a former convener of Zia Parishad, gained opportunities from government during Khaleeda Zia's reign. Now they have also seized opportunities from the present government.

Drought affects crops in Kushtia

UNB, Kushtia

The persisting drought for the last four months in Kushtia and its adjoining areas has been affecting standing crops and vegetables.

Rivers, canals, ponds and other water bodies of the district have dried up due to absence of rain for the last four months.

The drought has affected production of Rabi crops, including IRRI-Boro paddy. Twenty five per cent of the standing crops of the district have already been damaged by the persisting drought.

The level of underground water has fallen sharply. As a result, a large number of tubewells went inoperative, causing an acute scarcity of drinking water. Besides, the deep and the shallow tubewells of the district have also been rendered inoperative hampering irrigation.

The drought has severely affected harvesting of all summer crops. Drought has also damaged mango sprouts in almost all the trees of the area.

Sharp fall in the water of the rivers has also affected navigation. Thousands of farmers have fallen victims to the drought, which has been persisting since early November last year.

Farmers who were preparing to sow seeds are now sitting idle in the absence of rain. The farmers who cultivated their lands after borrowing money at a high rate of interest are now at a loss.

"I do not know how I shall repay the loan I have borrowed from bank," said a farmer with a note of utter frustration.

The farmers said vegetables worth crores of taka have also been damaged due to the prevailing drought in the region.

New poverty alleviation programme in 4 dists

BSS, Barisal

A new poverty alleviation programme titled 'The Small-holders Support' has been implemented in Barisal in four southern districts under Barisal Division at a cost of Taka 126 crore including foreign exchange component of Taka 70.14 crore in a bid to strengthen the rural economy during this fiscal.

According to an official source, the programme is being implemented jointly by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and the Bangladesh Agriculture Extension Department (BAED) in the districts of Barisal, Jhalakati, Patuakhali and Barguna.

The projects to be implemented include the construction of drains for irrigation, bridges and culverts, village-based training centres for farmers, rural roads and ghats (launch terminal) and platforms for loading and unloading of agriculture products.

Agricultural activities like imparting training to the farmers to adopt modern cultivation methods for increasing agriculture productions and its preservations and cultivation of high yielding variety of crops will be implemented under this programme.

Additional Director of Barisal Regional Agriculture Extension Department told that this programme would help boost agriculture production in this region and would help strengthen rural economy as a whole in the districts in future.

Meanwhile, preliminary work of the projects has already been started and its formal work is expected to start in the up-coming fiscal year.

Besides, carpeting on two-kilometre road, earthing on eight-kilometre of rural roads, development of a rural market for selling agriculture products, construction of 125 bridges and culverts and a major ghat are already under way now.

Wheat for re-excitation of canal in Pirojpur 'embezzled'

UNB, Pirojpur

Re-excitation of Damodar Khal in Pirojpur town is likely to be delayed as the committee formed to implement the canal re-excitation project has allegedly embezzled some 2,025 metric tons of wheat allocated for it.

Water development Board (WDB) took up the project in January 2000 as the sewerage system of Pirojpur town has been threatened due to massive siltation in the canal.

Pirojpur Municipality chairman had formed a five-member committee to implement the project and later two ward commissioners were

also included in the committee. But a few months after inauguration of the project work nine ward commissioners of the municipality in a written complaint to the Deputy Commissioner (DC) brought allegation of corruption against the committee.

The DC then formed a 5-member committee to investigate into the allegations and the probe committee after a marathon investigation found the committee members guilty of corruption.

When contacted DC SM Zahurul Islam recognised the fact and said he has already brought the matter to the notice of the higher authorities for appropriate action.



A mobile vegetable market at Talaimari bazaar in Rajshahi city where vendors sell their commodities from rickshaws. A large number of people buy vegetables from them. Vendors start selling vegetables in the morning and leave the place after mid-day.

PHOTO: STAR

Tomato growers in Narsingdi deprived of fair price

UNB, Narsingdi

Huge quantity of tomato are being perished in all the six upazilas of Narsingdi district due to sharp fall in its prices.

The growers are also being deprived of fair price of their produce this season due mainly to shortage of buyers.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), the farmers achieved a bumper production of tomato this season.

The juicy fruits were produced in good quantity in Belabo, Monohardi, Shibpur, Polash, Raipura and Sadar upazilas.

DAE initially had set a target to bring 3,500 hectares of land under tomato farming with a production target of 90,400 metric tons. But tomatoes were cultivated on 5,200 hectares of land this season and the total production stood at about 1.20 lakh metric tons.

As a result, price of the produce has dropped alarmingly in all the six upazilas and the farmers have been deprived of fair price due to lack of marketing facilities.

Official sources said the government this season did not disburse loan for cultivation of tomato. Taking advantage, the middlemen

and the moneylenders gave the farmers huge amount of loan at high rate of interest.

While visiting the tomato producing areas this correspondent found tomato is being sold at Tk one per kg in the field which is below the cost of production.

Many farmers are not harvesting their produce due to drastic fall in prices and as a result, the fruits are perishing in the fields.

On the contrary, it was found that the price of one-kg tomato in the retail market of the district town is Tk 4 per kg.

Grower Shafiuddin of Narayanpur village under Belabo upazila said that he cultivated 3 bighas of land and harvested 630 tons as against a total production cost of Tk 24,000. He got a return of Tk 32,000 by selling tomato in the beginning of the season. He said he is not harvesting the remaining production from the field following sharp decline in its prices.

Jalaluddin, another grower cum-businessman of Morzal village in Raipura upazila said that he bought nearly 350 kgs of tomato at the rate of Tk 0.75 per kg from the field and sold the same at the market at Tk 3.50 per kg.

Babul Miah, a wholesaler of the

district said that they got a total supply of 120 tons of tomato from different areas of the district and the wholesale supply price varies from Tk 3 to Tk 3.50 per kg.

Growers urged the government to take immediate steps to ensure fair price of their produce.



Members of Luxmipur Traders Welfare Council in Rajshahi brought out a stick procession recently protesting increasing trend of illegal toll collection by extortionists in the area.

PHOTO: STAR

NEWS SNAPS

Three killed by thunderbolt

UNB, Tangail

Three people including a couple were killed by a thunderbolt during a severe storm in the outskirts of Tangail town early on Saturday. Sources said Biren Karmakar, 40, and his wife Sumati Karmakar, 35, of Basha Khanpur died on the spot when their house caught fire due to lightning. Dulal of nearby Bartasha village was also killed by the lightning.

The storm damaged some kutcha house and uprooted trees near the town and in shoal areas.

Two killed in Khagrachhari road mishap

UNB, Khagrachhari

Two people were killed and 25 others injured, six critically, when an overloaded jeep skidded off the road in Amtali area of Matiranga upazila of Khagrachhari district Saturday morning. Police said the mishap took place at about 8 am as the Matiranga-bound jeep, locally known as 'Chander Gar', plunged into roadside ditch after its driver lost control over the steering.

Two passengers, Nuru Mia, 39, and an unidentified old man aged about 65 died on the spot. The injured were admitted to Matiranga and Khagrachhari Hospital. Condition of six injured was stated to be critical. The bodies were sent to hospital morgue for autopsy.

Another killed in Kushtia road mishap

UNB, Islamic University

A passer-by was crushed under the wheels of a bus near Madhupur on Kushtia-Dhaka Highway Saturday.

Witnesses said Ali Sheikh, 55, was injured after he was knocked by a bus carrying students of Islamic University while crossing the road at about 9 am. He succumbed to his injuries on way to Kushtia General Hospital.

Three succumb to injuries

UNB, Shariatpur

Three people were killed and at least 50 others injured in the seasonal storm that lashed Naria and Sadar upazilas Thursday. The dead were identified as Kashem, 35, Azz, 40, and Monir, 12, of Naria upazila. Tolazzal, 13, Selma Akhter, 10, Sattar Talukder, 18, and Ibrahim Bepari, 17, of Sadar upazila.

AL factions clash: 15 injured

UNB, Feni

A fierce clash between the activists of two factions in Sujaganur upazila Awami League on Thursday left at least 15 people injured by bullets, witnesses said. Police and witnesses said the clash erupted between the supporters of upazila AL general secretary Abdul Kashem and organising secretary Abdul Wahab about 8 am following hot exchange of words.

During the squabbles Abdul Matin, a supporter of Kashem group, assaulted rival Atsar Ali triggering a violent gunbattle that left at least 15 activists injured. Critically injured Shatu, 20, and Babu, 25, were admitted to the local hospital. Ten shops were ransacked during the rampage. Riot police were deployed in the upazila headquarters as tensions mounted there.

Feni jail inmates clash

UNB, Feni

Inmates in Feni district jail belonging to BNP and Awami League clashed on Thursday afternoon when both groups were shouting slogans. The jail authority quickly intervened and separated the feuding groups. None was hurt seriously. Some windows and a tubewell were damaged during the clash.

BNP activists outnumbered the Awami League workers among about 500 inmates in the jail that has a capacity of 122. Thursday's clash between the two political groups was the fourth in a series of clashes that began on Friday. Additional police were deployed as tension was prevailing inside the jail.

BCL factions clash: 16 injured

UNB, Shariatpur

At least 16 people were injured, three with bullet, in a clash between rival factions of pro-Awami League Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in Zajira upazila of Shariatpur district on Saturday.

Witnesses said pedestrians Eskander Shikder, Sama Akhter and Kali Akhter received bullet wounds during the gunfight between the rival groups in the morning. The injured were admitted to local hospital.

25 injured in Kushtia clash

UNB, Kushtia

At least 25 people, including five policemen, were injured in a clash at Bheramara upazila headquarters in Kushtia district on Saturday evening. Witnesses said the clash ensued when police intercepted a pro-hartal procession of the 4-party alliance and the opposition activists pelted brickbats at police.

Supporters of ruling Awami League who brought out an anti-hartal procession joined the police in encountering the opposition supporters. Police fired some 30 shots and lobbed 20 tear gas shells to disperse the opposition activists. Over 100 rounds of gunshots and numerous bombs were exploded during the hour-long encounter, local people said.

Villagers' clash leaves 50 injured

UNB, Hobiganj

A clash between residents of two villages over a trifling matter left at least 50 injured in sadar upazila of Hobiganj district on Saturday.

Witnesses said several hundred people of Dhulikhali and Rangergaon villages fought a one-hour battle. Of the injured, 12 were rushed to sadar hospital in a critical condition. Another report said, 10 people received injuries in a clash at Bogla Bazaar in the municipality area on Saturday. Police said the clash took place at about 9 am when one Shamsuddin and his supporters went to occupy a house which was under possession of Nimbor Ali.

15 hurt in AL-opposition clash

UNB, Pirojpur

Some 15 people were injured in a clash between the supporters of ruling and opposition parties at Nazirpur upazila headquarters in Pirojpur district Thursday. Nine of the injured including Awami League activists Milon Khan, 25, and Mostafizur Rahman, 29, were admitted to Nazirpur hospital.

The clash ensued when some Awami League supporters attacked Jamaat activists who were miking in favour of Delwar Hossain Saidee MP's meeting scheduled for Friday. Later, BNP and Jatiya Party supporters joined hands with the Jamaat activists and locked into clash with the ruling party men.

Woman workers confine mill manager

UNB, Thakurgaon

Woman workers of Thakurgaon Silk Factory kept its manager Abu Taker in confinement in his room overnight Thursday to press home their demands, including realisation of arrears.

Other demands include removal of discriminatory attitudes towards the local silk factory, appointment of separate manager for the Thakurgaon Silk factory and supply of raw material for it. Also manager of Rajshahi Silk Factory Abu Taher faced the confinement when he visited the factory on the day. The workers released him after an agreement reached with them at 5 am next day.

Thakurgaon Bar Council polls held

UNB, Thakurgaon

Jatiyatubadi Lawyers' Dikya Parishad swept the local bar council polls held on Tuesday in Thakurgaon.

Asgar Hossain and Abdul Halim were elected president and general secretary respectively while only an executive committee member was elected from Sammilito Lawyers' Coordination Council. Some 97 voters exercised their franchise in the polls held peacefully.

Rape victims face a lot of hassles in court

UNB, Sakhira

The 'ejlas' (court) was crowded. All eyes were on the dock where the victim of rape, a school-going girl, was standing. Defence lawyer repeatedly questioned the girl how she was raped. "Say, did you enjoy it?"

The hapless girl raised both hands to cover her face and burst into tears. But ignoring the girl's predicament, the defence lawyer continued his questioning.

"I was disappointed by such questionings. I was mortified with humiliation and shame. It was not possible on my part to describe the details (of rape)," said Kanra (not real name), a school-going girl of coastal Sakhira district, who was raped a few months back by a relative.

As she failed to narrate everything that happened on the fateful day to satisfy the court, the case against the accused was dismissed on February 20, 2001.

"In our socio-cultural context, no woman can answer properly to the incisive questions from the lawyers as she normally feels shame and humiliation," said Ruhul Amin, an advocate-assistant of Sakhira Court commenting over the legal procedure. "To me, it seems like a second time rape," he said.

During questioning, the defence lawyer often asks details of the rape sequence in a bid to prove that the victim enjoyed the very moment and so it cannot be called rape.

In order to obtain justice, a rape victim is to prove that she has been raped.

continue through the criminal system. "It is ultimately victimisation of the victim. The criminal who committed the crime remains out of all procedure and harassment," said advocate Tawhida Khondker, a human rights activist and a member of Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA).

The incident of rape in Bangladesh is high in the South Asian region.

The number of rapes in Bangladesh is 33 times higher than in Nepal, where 0.3 per cent are victims of rape, cited the Human Development Report in South Asia 1999.

According to police reports, cases filed under the Women and Children Oppression (Special Provision) Act of 1995 in Bangladesh were 1,363 in 1996, 2,224 in 1997, 3,630 in 1998 and 3,596 in 1999.

According to a report of Ain-O-Salish Kendra for 1999 about 47.3 per cent of total rape incidents, with victims aged between 19-24, were not filed with police stations.

The report picked up data from newspapers to show that only 460 cases of rape were filed out of 753 published incidents in 1997. It was followed by 856 cases out of 1,425 incidents in 1998 and 652 cases out of 1,238 reported incidents in 1999.

"Most of the rape incidents are not reported to police or published in the media because the victims and their families are generally intimidated by the fear of social stigma and threats," observed Salma Akhter, a human rights activist working in Dhaka.

The offence of rape is normally settled out of court through village arbitration, she said.

escaped punishment as the victim's family was often persuaded to compromise either in exchange of money or agreeing to give the victim in marriage to the perpetrator of the offence. Sometimes, they were silenced under threat.

The middle-aged lawyer said that in 2000, only one rapist was punished in Sakhira court while all the other cases were either withdrawn on compromise or dismissed for lack of proof.

A rape victim is denied justice following loopholes in the existing laws that begin from lodging complaint with the police, followed by medical test.

At every step, she is to face a lot of hassle and unpleasant situation. But to get justice, she must endure everything.

Safia Azim, a teacher in the Department of Psychology at the Dhaka University, said the justice-seekers task begins with a wrong procedure as she is to go first to the police station for filing a case and then to a doctor for medical test.

As most victims reach the hospital late, all telltale evidence vanish by that time and doctors fail to find anything incriminating against the offender. The consequent medical report deprives the victim from getting justice, said Dr Mehboob Hossain of Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital in Dhaka.

Safia Azim said: "Law should be enacted by allowing the victims to go directly to the hospital for medical examination without any reference from police authority."

However, after completing procedures in police station and hospital, the victim is to face the court where the "principle of burden of proof" becomes a vital factor for denial of justice.

Burden of proof for the victim of rape means an evidential system, a liability of a party making an assertion against his/her opponents to prove his/her assertion in regulating the conduct of the litigation.

Salma Akhter said that as the burden of proof lies on the victim, it is difficult for her to fulfil requirements to prove such a heinous crime committed against her. "The defendant assumes no legal burden of proof by merely denying the charge."

She said: "In our social context a rape victim, irrespective of age, status and religion, confronts the society as an object of shame or despise as if the fault was hers to be in a situation and the offender took the advantages of this confrontation."

As the victim herself is the witness of the fact and her statement is the direct evidence, the defence lawyer tries to prove that she enjoyed the situation. "And if he is able to prove the victim somehow felt enjoyment, justice will be denied," Ruhul Amin said.

The definition of rape provided by the Penal Code and Nari-O-Shishu Nirjaton (Bishesh Bidhan) Ain, 1995 (Women and Children Oppression (Special Provision Act)) is not comprehensive.

"There must be an alternative to the principle of burden of proof in rape case and the burden should lie on the accused," Salma Akhter said.

The court must cause to maintain decency during the process of examination of witness, she said. "If the general immoral character shakes the credit of the female, the same principle will also be applied for shaking the character of the accused."