

7 girls burnt alive

FROM PAGE 1
this correspondent.

The death toll and the number of injured could be less if the gate could be opened, they said.

The identity of the dead could not be known as their bodies were charred. Most of the survivors may have permanent scars on faces and other parts of their bodies, sources in the hospitals said.

Of the injured, 12 were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and three to Pangu Hospital (Orthopaedic Hospital).

Those admitted to DMCH are Halima, 10, Roksana, 20, Momtaj, 11, Rabeya, 13, Halima, 13, Shahina, 11, Marium, 13, Sonia, 10, Ayesha, 9, Fahima, 8, Salma, 16 and Asma, 10.

Twenty injured students are being treated at a residence near the madrassah. Some of the injured have been taken by their parents, the madrassah authorities said. The rest are being treated at different clinics.

Fire Brigade sources said the fire might have originated from an electric short-circuit.

But Fazlur Rahman, a member of the madrassah's advisory committee, in a case filed with Demra thana alleged that the institution was set on fire in a sequel to previous enmity. But he did not name any person in the case.

There were about 400 students at the madrassah. Over 300 of them aged between 6 to 22 were staying there on the fateful night. Others went home on the weekend, its authorities said.

"I was sleeping on the first floor. I got up feeling heat, 13-year-old Nasrin Jahan Nilu told this correspondent at the residence near the madrassah. Nilu suffered serious burn injuries in her face and hands.

"The fire originated hardly 10 foot from my bed. As the fire spread, the screaming girls went to the ground floor to escape. I along with some others jumped from the first floor", she said.

Twelve -year-old Rahima, being treated there said, "I got up hearing screams and went to the ground floor along with some others." She said the girls ran here and there finding no exit.

"I saw some girls catch fire and dying in front of me. They were crying for help, but everybody was frantically trying to escape," said Rahima, who hailed from Kachua of Chandpur district.

Another victim, Shahina, also said she jumped from the first floor. Her whole face was severely burnt.

Fifteen- year- old Marium said,

within 10 to 15 minutes after the fire broke out, all the inmates gathered at the main agate. "We rushed to the main gate to escape, but it was locked from outside," she said.

About 25 minutes later, local people and some teachers of the madrassah who stayed nearby came and broke the gate.

Six fire fighter teams reached the spot within half-an-hour and brought the fire under control after about three hours' struggle. They along with local people rescued the injured girls and sent them to hospitals.

The fire fighters recovered seven bodies.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Muzahid visited the spot yesterday afternoon and expressed deep shock at the horrific incident.

BNP men torch 10 houses of AL supporters in Feni

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

At least 10 houses belonging to AL supporters were torched by BNP men at village North Jaylshkar under Daganbhuiyan Upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

According to villagers, BNP and JCD activists named Abul Hossain, Afsar, Ratan, Manik, Helal, Sadequr, Huda, Ayub, Monjur, Azad, Hannan, Mostafa, Monir and Nur Nabi attacked the houses of Awami League supporters Abdul Haque, Belal Hossain, Nurul Haque and Abdul Wahab at about 3 am and set them afire.

The victims claimed that property worth Tk 50 lakh were gutted in the fire.

Local BNPMP VP Joynal, DC Feni A F M Solaiman Chowdhury and SP Helaluddin Badri visited the village yesterday.

Child trafficker

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Labagh police recovered the body of an unidentified young woman from near the old graveyard at Azimpur yesterday morning.

There were marks of injury in her throat. Police said they suspect that miscreants raped and strangled her on Friday night.

A case was filed with Lalbagh thana and body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Resist torture: Hasina

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rule.

The president alliance government cancelled the holiday.

Hasina said that there was no peace and stability in the country and the economic condition is the worst ever, she called up the people to build up resistance to torture injustice.

She also urged the people to protest the present "conspiracy of distorting history" by erasing the name of Bangabandhu and tell the new generation the truth.

"The defeated forces of liberation want to delete the history of liberation war, victory and Bangabandhu, but it is not possible to wipe out the name of Bangabandhu from people's minds."

The opposition leader maintained that the defeated forces do not believe in independence of Bangladesh and want to make Bangladesh 'a province of Pakistan.'

"To satisfy their Pakistani masters they do not allow the children to know the truth," she said asking teachers, guardians and all concerned to enlighten their children about the truth, the true history of the country's victory and the contri-

bution of father of the nation.

Children, colourfully dressed, joined the function and welcomed the former prime minister with a dance performance, a song on Bangabandhu. Later, Hasina distributed prizes among the children and exchanged pleasantries with them.

Awami League Presidium member Abdus Samad Azad, cultural personality Asaduzzaman Noor MP, General Secretary of Bangabandhu Shishu Kishore Mela, Shirin Akhtar Manju and President Mia Monsoob also spoke on the occasion.

Proshika

FROM PAGE 12
Chowdhury and Dr Mamun, brother of Azharul along with their lawyer Barrister Tanzibul Alam. Haq to meet the arrested persons.

Dr Kamal Hossain and Barrister Tanzibul Alam appeared in the court on behalf of the petitioners.

Omar Tareque Chowdhury and Azharul Islam were arrested on March 11 under Section 54 for their alleged involvement in 'anti-state activities', and later detained for one month.

faultily positioned slabs remained there for months.

After Thursday's tragic accident, the Mayor served a show-cause notice on DCC's Chief Engineer Rashedul Alam lobbied for Shamsuddin and Allied Engineering," said a DCC source. The Ministry played 'a dubious role' and awarded the work to Surma. Gafur Bhuiyan is a BNP MP.

"In our original project proposal we had plans for construction of 20 steel-frame overbridges, which are much lighter, easy to install and also easily removable," said an engineer. He explained that it is dangerous to construct such heavy overbridges in the city as a vehicle could knock down these structures anytime by accident.

The DCC officials said that the moment Surma International started to construct the foot bridges, they showed signs of inexperience and lack of professionalism. The company did not have proper cranes and depended on a manual jack to position those heavy slabs overhead. After jacking up those 100-ton girders, they just left those there, supported by pieces of timber, despite repeated warnings by top DCC officials, newspapers and members of the public. Those

Bangabandhu

FROM PAGE 1
AL chief Sheikh Hasina and other leaders of her party are scheduled to place wreaths at Sheikh Mujib's portrait at the Bangabandhu Museum in the city's Dhamondi area.

The programmes including hoisting of the national and party flags, discussions, seminars, exhibitions, blood donations and cultural sessions.

In a message, Sheikh Hasina recalled that Bangladesh won independence following a prolonged struggle led by Bangabandhu.

"He had become the father of the nation because of his political wisdom and farsightedness. Bangabandhu is one of the celebrated world leaders, who led struggles for national independence and emancipation in the 20th century," said Hasina, the eldest daughter of Bangabandhu assassinated in a military coup on August 15, 1975.

AL MPs

FROM PAGE 1
their letters in the move towards en masse resignations. "We will let you know after completion of the process," he said.

A joint meeting of the AL central working committee and party MPs on Thursday took the crucial decision in protest at a government move to remove Bangabandhu's portrait from all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies and its 'misrule', as well.

Power theft

FROM PAGE 12
problem deep-rooted and observed that accountability did not improve despite the country's democratic transition.

Chairing the session, Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the rise of hooliganism in educational institutions has made them dysfunctional.

"We won't be able to compete in the market with the present education system," he observed.

Omar Haider Chowdhury, research director of BIDS, made a presentation on 'Poverty, Education and Public Expenditure' and Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Dr Atiur Rahman and Dr Binayak Sen of BIDS participated in the discussion.

In his presentation, Chowdhury said the dismal performance of primary education violates the education system and contributes to the colossal systems loss in the education sector.

Dr Sen said the country has come out of the famine syndrome, which he referred to as a success.

ISPs

FROM PAGE 12
The ISP leaders told the minister that it was impossible for them to cope with such an 'irrational rent hike'. The BTBT, they alleged, plans to subsidise its own Internet service with the additional revenue.

The ISP leaders told the minister that the BTBT had already lowered the charge for its Internet service at the expense of the taxpayer's money.

Besides, they argued, the BTBT does not have to pay for licence, line rent and demand note charges as the ISPs do, they argued.

The ISP leaders demanded that there should be a level-playing field.

The minister assured the delegation that his ministry would not take any decision that might hinder the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) in the country, the ISPA president said.

However, he did not 'commit anything' about enhancement of monthly line rent for the ISPs, Manju added.

"If the thrust is to turn the country's ICT sector into a foreign currency earner, the government should not slap on the ISPs such an exorbitant tariff," he said.

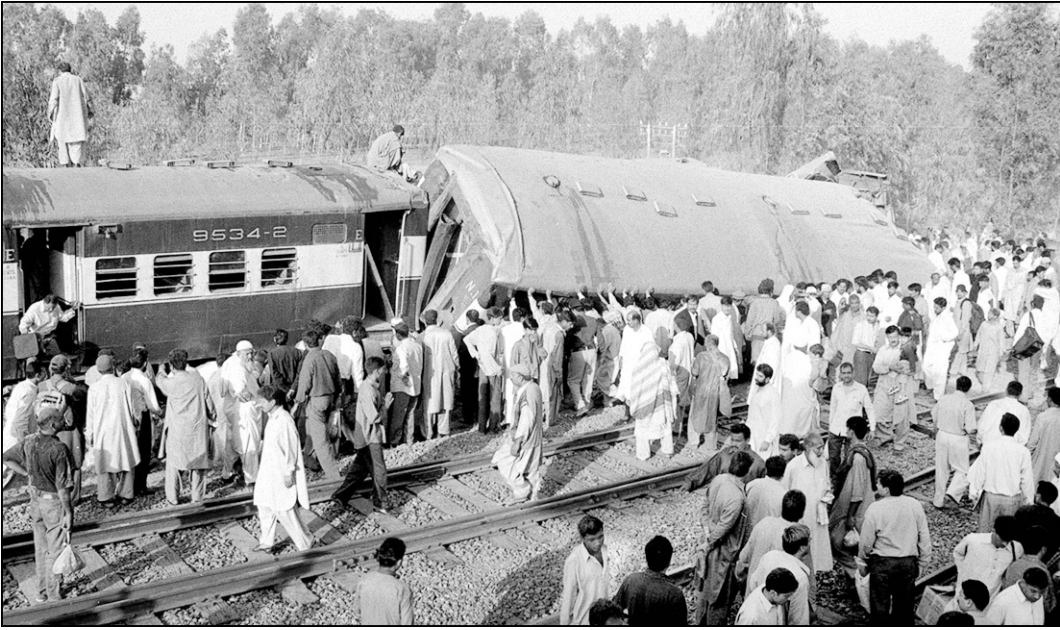
Manju revealed that the ISP leaders could not endorse Post and Telecommunications Secretary Omar Faruq's request that they subscribe the E1 lines of the BTBT since there was not adequate information on the new lines.

Dolphin

FROM PAGE 12
creamy white colour, long beak and a large dorsal fin atop a subtle hump made them identified as Indo-Pacific humpbacked dolphins Sousa chinesis. The species is quite familiar in the marine waters of northern Australia and throughout south and south-east Asia, but it had never been spotted in the Sundarbans or probably anywhere in Bangladesh, Rashiduzzaman said.

The expedition will continue till March 24 and the scientists hope they would be able to estimate the size and distribution of the three dolphin species, now known to be in the Sundarbans, as well as evaluate threats to their conservation. At IUCN plans to make public its report sometime in September this year.

The expedition led by Prof Benazir Ahmed of Chittagong University comprises Brian D Smith and Gill Braulik of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group, Dipani Sutaria from India and Rashiduzzaman.



Passengers and residents try to rescue the injured from a train that was derailed at Qila Sattar Shah near Lahore yesterday. Five passengers were killed and 14 others injured in the incident.

BNP faces split over nomination for RCC Mayoral post

ABDUL WADOOD, Rajshahi

Local leaders of the ruling BNP and its front organisations have split into two factions over party nomination for the coming mayoral polls of Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC).

Both factions, one demanding nomination of city mayor and MP from Rajshahi-2 constituency (RCC area and Poba upazila) Mizanur Rahman Minu, and the other supporting former city unit president of JCD Shahid Hasan Sayeed, have been out on a smear campaign against each other through political propaganda.

Although the incumbent mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu himself has not clearly said anything about contesting the polls, his supporters both in Rajshahi and Dhaka have been demanding his nomination.

About a dozen leaders of BNP and its front organisations are lobbying for party nomination in the RCC mayoral polls.

March 20 is the last date for submission of nomination papers for elections to the offices of mayor and ward commissioners of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna. The elections are scheduled to be held on April 25.

BNP sources said most of the aspirants are now in Dhaka lobbying through their respective channels. They are, BNP city unit president Adv Ekhlaq Hossain, secretary and former MP Azizur Rahman, district unit general secretary Adv Qamrul Munir, district unit organising secretary Salehuddin Baby, GP of

Rajshahi Judge Court Adv Abul Kasem, Jubo Dal city unit convenor Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul, JCD city unit president Shafiqul Haq Milon, district unit president Mizanur Rahman Khokon, former president of city unit JCD Shahid Hasan Sayeed and ward commissioner Akhtaruzzaman Babu.

Of the candidates so far, Minu and Sayeed are in good position, sources said. Being the central organising secretary and an MP, Minu has good relations with many of the party stalwarts including party chief Khaleda Zia. Sayeed on the other hand is the younger brother of Nadim Mostafa MP, and enjoys the favour of party secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and PM's son Tareque Zia.

Except Sayeed and Munir, all other aspirants are actually Minu's people. They would vie for party candidature only in the case of Minu's absence from the race," said a city unit BNP leader on condition of anonymity, adding that they had actually been working to resist the anti-Minu forces.

Sayed in a press conference recently said he had gotten the go-ahead from the party high command. "Everything should not go into one man's pocket," Sayeed said in a veiled remark without mentioning Minu's name. He however said he would accept the party's decision no matter what.

Most of the city unit leaders of BNP and almost all the leaders of Jubo Dal and JCD are with Minu, party sources said. Through meetings and press statements, they have voiced their opposition to Sayeed as a major candidate of the

party, saying that he had not been active in the last five years and has not held any important portfolio of the party or its front organisations at any time. They say there is no alternative to Minu till now and that he must be given nomination for the mayoral polls to confirm a win.

Supporters of Sayeed on the other hand are impressing upon the importance of creating a new leadership for the sake of the party's future.

This rift between the two factions is actually a sequel to a longstanding dispute between Minu and Kabir Hossain, who is now almost inactive in the field. The two brothers Nadim Mostafa MP and Sayeed are supporters of Kabir, BNP sources said.

Abul Kalam Azad made press secy to Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Abul Kalam Azad, former press minister at Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, has been appointed press secretary to Awami League president Sheikh Hasina.

Jawadul Karim former press secretary to AL chief, has been appointed press advisor to the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

The orders will come into effect soon, said separate press releases from the office of the opposition leader yesterday.

adding that under this section, no one is placed on remand and bail is mandatory. If police arrest any one under this section, they must bring specific allegation against the arrested, he claimed.

After hearing both the sides, Magistrate Kazi Meraj rejected the bail petition of Alamgir and placed him on a two-day remand. He also directed the authorities concerned not to torture the arrested during the remand period.

The court also granted the petition for showing Alamgir arrested in the case filed with Kachua thana.

Additional police force was deployed on the court premises to control the big crowd there during the hearing.

Later, Alamgir was taken to the Malibagh SB office and detained there. He was shown arrested under Section 54 of the CrPC.

The defence lawyers included Rahmat Ali, Shahara Khatun, SM Altaf Hossain, M Sajwar Hossain, Abdur Rahman Hawlader, Momtaz Uddin Mehedi and Mizanur Rahman Mallik.

arrested in a case filed with Kochua thana in Chandpur for an attempt to murder on September 20 last year.

The case is based on a wireless message from the SP of Chandpur stating that the former state minister was suspected of an attempt to murder. But the message did not mention whom he attempted to kill.

Police submitted another petition seeking one month's detention for alamgir under the Special Powers Act.

The defence lawyers submitted two petitions one seeking bail for Alamgir and the other for cancellation of the remand prayer by police.

They mentioned that the former state minister went to Singapore for treatment of diabetes and from there he went to the US to see his two sons before returning home.

"He was taken to the Malibagh SB office and tortured there for the whole night. He was not even allowed to take food and sleep at night," they told the court.

With the permission of the court, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir said he had served as a district magistrate and also as secretary. At that time, he came to know the application of Section 54 of the CrPC he said,

Politics sans ideology

FROM PAGE 12
Chaired by Dr M Zahir, the session was participated by politicians, academics, former bureaucrats, representatives of donor agencies and professionals. Dr Abdus Sattar Syed, a visiting scholar at BUP, presented the keynote paper of the session.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said corruption, criminalisation and violence have become inter-linked and are the key obstacles to sustainable development.

"Frankly speaking, politics has become a profitable business. At present, the country's politics is not based on any ideology," he said.

In the past, politicians used to patronise terrorists. But now, terrorists control elections, he said.

Menon attributed the deterioration in politics to the absence of 'genuine politicians' in the parliament.

He mentioned that 17 lawmakers in the last parliament were accused in various cases and 48 per cent of the candidates, who got nomination in the last elections, were industrialists.

He stressed the need for an independent anti-corruption commission. "We cannot fight corruption when the Bureau of Anti-corruption is under the Prime Minister's Office," Menon observed.

In the keynote paper, Dr A Sattar Syed referred to the filing of graft cases against some ministers by the coalition government and said it has become commonplace for successive governments to file such cases against members of the previous government without properly following them up.

According to a recent report by the Transparency International, Bangladesh, the anti-corruption bureau received 4,535 complaints between 1994 and 2000 and only

9.2 per cent of them finally land in courts, he informed.

He said 59 per cent of complaints has been pending.

Dr M Zahir identified absence of rule of law as the key reason behind the existing situation. According to him, the law enforcement agencies would never be able to discharge their duties properly unless political interference stops.

Tofail Ahmed, who teaches public administration at Chittagong University, observed that corruption has taken an institutionalised shape and also got social legitimacy.

He observed that a radical change in the political culture of the country is needed to overcome the situation. He questioned the source of fund of the political parties.

Some participants observed that people were taking law into their own hands after losing confidence in police.

4,700 expelled

FROM PAGE 1
Panchagarh.

The number of expelled examinees under the Dhaka Education Board is 670, officials said.

Five teachers were expelled for helping students cheat in examinations in Kishoreganj and Jamalpur. Also arrested was one student in Kishoreganj.

One hundred and seventy-three students and two teachers were expelled in Jamalpur. Forty-five students and three teachers were expelled in Kishoreganj.

One student was expelled in Dhaka city, seven in Dhaka district, ten in Manikganj, 20 in Munshiganj, five in Narayanganj, 62 in Narsingdi, 49 in Mymensingh, 164 in Netrokona, 21 in Tangail, 40 in Sherpur, 19 in Faridpur, 23 in Madaripur, 34 in Shariatpur, 20 Gopalganj and 22 in Rajbari.

The number of expelled students under the Jessore Education Board is 320.

Fifteen candidates were expelled in Jessore, 11 in Narail, 18 in Jhenaidah, ten in Magura, 16 in Khulna, seven in Satkhira, 142 in Kushtia, 26 in Chuadanga and 75 in

Meherpur.

As many as 508 examinees were expelled under Chittagong Education Board. Of them, 346 were in Chittagong, 43 in Cox's Bazar, 106 in Rangamati, six in Khagrachhari and seven in Bandarban.

Two hundred and forty students were expelled under the Barisal Education Board.

Also expelled were two teachers from two examination centres in Pirojpur. Of them, 49 were in Bhola, 22 in Jhalakathi, 17 in Pirojpur, 33 in Patuakhali and 119 in Barisal.

The number of expelled candidates under the Comilla Education Board is 681.

Forty-six examinees were expelled in Chandpur, 86 in Noakhali, 82 in Feni, 73 in Laxmipur and 394 in Comilla.

Six teachers -- three in Chandpur and Comilla each -- were also expelled for their alleged connivance in cheating.

Fifty-six students were expelled under the Sylhet Education Board. Of them, 25 were in Sylhet, seven in Hobiganj, ten in Moulvibazar and 14 in Sunamganj.

Victims of nature's whims

FROM PAGE 12
At the age of 65, Malik does not have the courage or strength to change his profession. So he keeps on tilling Boro lands, no matter it reaps a good harvest or not. But young Dilwar Hossain of the village sees paddy cultivation as a liability now.

"I have been working as a labourer at Bhologanj stone quarry for the last couple of years. Many fellow villagers followed me as it gives more earning than farming," said Hossain, 28.

The villagers feel that if the under-construction road-cum-embankment from Dirai to Shulla is completed, farmers will be able to grow two crops a year as this will save lands from flood.

Besides, farmers need short-duration rice varieties so that they can harvest the crop before early floods.

There is virtually no road communication in the area. Rickshaw ply in some areas during dry season. Villagers have to negotiate vast sheets of water in boats during the wet season.

This correspondent had to walk

miles to reach Kashipur village from Dirai thana headquarter.

"Since Pakistani days, ministers are claiming that development is taking place. Is this the level of development that has taken place in all these years?" the UP chairman asked.

Nazrul Islam of Kashipur village is a contractor by profession. "Roads would have been constructed long ago and unemployed youths would get work had the allotments been utilised properly. Big chunks of allotments of foodgrain and money meant for infrastructure development are not utilised properly", he claimed.

The villagers also complained that agriculture extension officials never visit Kashipur because of the bad communication system.

The next generation has also no future, they said. The nearest high school is about three miles away, at Krishnapur under Kaliajuri thana in Netrokona. Few boys or girls walk the distance in dry season or avail boats in wet season to go to a high school there, they said.

Police bar procession

FROM PAGE 1
Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner authorising the Jamaat procession.

The protesters then held a brief demonstration right at the spot where the police stopped them.

"We preferred not to violate the ban for it could prompt a police action on us and the government might blame us for creating a law and order situation," Tofail Ahmed told the protesters later. "It's a government blueprint to shift the blame for its own failure to maintain law and order on opposition shoulders."

Tofail and other AL leaders also warned of a tough agitation against the government's undemocratic behaviour.

Dhaka's Mayor Mohammad Hanif accused the government of mounting its repression on the opposition understanding that its days were numbered.

Addressing the rally at the Mukhtangon earlier, the AL leaders asked the ruling coalition not to remove the portrait of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from government

offices and other designated places by repealing the law in this regard.

They promised a tougher agitation "if the government went ahead with the plan to undermine Bangabandhu by removing his portrait."

The AL organised the rally as part of a countryside demonstration protesting the government move to bring down Bangabandhu's portrait from all government offices and educational institutions.

Protest rallies were also held in other parts of the country, party sources said.

ANBP lawmaker last week tabled a bill seeking repeal of the law for preservation and display of Mujib's portrait enacted by the previous Awami League government early last year. The House is expected to approve the draft law soon.

This also prompted a decision on Thursday by all the 58 AL lawmakers including opposition leader Sheikh Hasina to soon resign en masse from parliament.

Attack on women

FROM PAGE 1
reported last year, with 340 women falling victim. Two hundred and thirteen became victim of acid attack they year before.

Last year, 2,343 people were arrested for alleged involvement in repression on women. However, none was punished.

There were 3,189 cases of repression on women last year, according to police report.

Newspapers reported 115 cases of repression of women and children, 45 of acid attack and 28 of dowry-related violence. Thirteen women were murdered in dowry-related incidents while three committed suicide. The trend shows a 14 per cent rise from the year before.

In the first two months of current year, 279 women came under acid attack. There have been 139 deaths and 43 abused in dowry-related incidents.

A total of 3,153 incidents of repression on women and children took place between October and December last year while the number was 3,886 from July to September and 3,325 from April to June.

The existing law is sufficient and better than that of any other country of world but its implementation is not so effective.

The courts, set up to handle cases under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, lack logistic support that hampers speedy dispensation of justice, sources said.

Both the Acid Crime Control Act, 2002 and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 1995 have been introduced following sharp rise in attack on women.

However, the reality remains unchanged for the women.

"We are losing witnesses because of sluggish pace of trial," Advocate Elena Khan, an NGO activist, said.

Advocate Salma Ali of the Bangladesh Mahila Ainjibi Samity said that political will is imperative to have the desired impact of the new law.

Police are no serious to properly prepare the FIR, she complained, alleging that they act on behalf of the accused in most cases for one reason or the other.

Hindu

FROM PAGE 12
The police arrested around 100 of the attackers.

Both the VHP and the Bajrang Dal later said the vandals were not connected with their groups, the Star TV news channel said, adding that at least 500 people were involved in the audacious attack.

The army was deployed on the streets of Gujarat following last month's large-scale religious riots which claimed the lives of some 700 people, mainly Muslims.

The riots were triggered by a Muslim-led attack on a train carrying Hindu activists back from Ayodhya town, where Hindu zealots in 1992 destroyed an ancient mosque.

Indefinite curfews were imposed in several areas of the state, including in parts of Ahmedabad which was worst affected by last month's riots.