

Fallout of grenade attacks cripples city life

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The capital is reeling under the shock of Saturday's grenade attacks that killed at least 18 people in a gory scene that played out at an Awami League (AL) rally on Bangabandhu Avenue.

The morning rush-hour traffic was exceptionally low yesterday, as fears of a repeat of overnight clashes forced cars, taxicabs, buses and minibuses to stay off the roads.

Long-haul trucks and buses did not run from the city, as the AL and its front organisations called hartals in several districts in protest at the attacks that relive post-apocalyptic movie scenes.

Most private schools were closed yesterday, while some will remain closed indefinitely. Viharunnisa Noon School and College will remain closed until August 25 because of the uncertain situation caused by the grisly massacre that also injured hundreds of people in front of the Awami League office.

Rumours were rife about any curfew and imposition of Section 144 in the city, as people were worried about the shifting situation in the wake of near-simultaneous attacks that apparently targeted Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina.

Across the city, many private offices remained closed and some opened their offices and shops closed them at lunch in Motijheel, the commercial heart of the capital, not far from Bangabandhu Avenue.

Hundreds of office-goers were seen waiting for public transport that was thin all day.

Policemen in Gulistan and Motijheel said traffic was about 70 percent less than usual.

"I did not know school was closed because of the attacks. I came to know when I reached the school," said a teacher of Mastermind school.

"Dhanmondi area turned quiet during school hours and that's very unusual," she added.

Some teachers of private schools called their students at home Saturday night,



The usually busy North South Road is deserted -- an after-effect of Saturday's grenade attacks on an Awami League rally.

asking their parents not to send their children to school.

"We cannot put our children's lives at risk," said the principal of a private school in Dhanmondi.

Although government schools did not close, parents did not send their children to school.

A mother of a student of Dhanmondi Government Boys School said she would not have come with her child if there had been

no exams. "The government should declare an emergency vacation until the situation gets back to normal. We are worried about our children."

"Bomb attacks these days have become so rife that we always think a bomb could take away any life anytime," said a research officer of a private organisation.

"The grenade attacks that massacred many could be identified with what we see in Iraq," said Mushfique Alam, a businessman.

"We are shocked. The buzzing question is 'What is going on?'" said Aminur Rahman, an executive.

"I had to come to office, or else I would have stayed back home," a government official said.

The fear of unexploded grenades hangs on Bangabandhu Avenue, where witnesses said 13 grenades exploded and two unexploded grenades were found on the scene.

The Rapid Action Battalion and police

think there could be more unexploded grenades in City Bhaban and Ramna Bhaban that apparently provided a set for attackers to throw grenades.

"The police are guarding the area and we are not able to open our shops," said a shop owner at Ramna Bhaban.

"The police should search and remove all unexploded grenades," said another shop owner at Ramna Bhaban.

Deluge victims in new woes



A family returns home from the shelter they took during the recent floods.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Flood-hit people returned home to different woes: joblessness, lack of money and inhabitable condition.

This year's deluge displaced thousands of people from low-lying areas in and around the capital, such as Demra, Sabujbagh and Khilgaon, and landed them in flood shelters.

Despite recession of floodwaters last week, some homeless people are still hanging around the flood shelters, looking for food.

"I took shelter in the City Corporation Adarsha High School in Demra during the floods," said Khoka, who lost his basic roadside house to floodwaters in Dhalpur. He is now roaming in search of a

shelter for his family of five.

"During our stay in the shelter, we survived on relief food and drinking water," Rimi said.

"But we are now in dire straits. No home, no food and no money."

Jasim, a farmer of Uttarpar at Kazla, returned home a couple of days ago and found his house in rundown condition. "The yard in front of my house is still wet and muddy and fences collapsed because of floodwaters," he told Star City. The land Jasim farmed is still under water and he has no job.

There are few others who could not move in, as the houses are still inhabitable. "Although floodwaters receded from the area, my house is surrounded by sludge," said Marjina, a resident of Dhalpur

in Demra, who took refuge in the garage of the City Corporation Mechanical Department.

Marjina, who used to sell snacks in the locality, said people cannot afford to buy what she traded in. "My husband, a green-grocer, does not have the cash to start his business," she added.

The educational institutions that suffered damage because of waterlogging started their academic activities on Saturday after a month's break.

"Rats damaged valuable files and documents," said Mohammad Salaudhin, headmaster of Haider Ali Primary School in Manda, adding the school compound is still muddy and walls are damped.

Traffic goes runaway, gridlock snowballs

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Commuters confront heavy gridlock every day, as buses, especially minibuses, are pouring onto roads at will.

Traffic chaos was expected to ease once major roads were made off-limits to rickshaws and pushcarts, but buses and minibuses did not help minimise the congestion.

Most buses pull in anywhere on the road to let passengers in and out, as they lack proper stops. "It is risky for passengers and pedestrians as well," says Shamim Ahmed, who commutes to Motijheel by minibus from Mirpur Section 10. He blamed most accidents on the reckless run

of minibuses.

Private bus companies have occupied sidewalks with makeshift ticket booths. "It prevents pedestrians walking on footpaths," said Ashraf Jahangir, resident of Segunbagicha.

"The city seems to have turned into a large bus terminal with numerous ticket counters," says Arif Ahmed, who lives in Mohakhali.

A total of 917 buses and minibuses registered with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) until December 11, 2001, but 2,978 private buses and minibuses are now plying 66 routes and sub-routes in the city, also used by 1,589 human haulers adding to pressure on the roads.

Officials with Dhaka Urban Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) and the traffic division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) differed with the number and said 5,800 buses ply city roads.

Private buses and minibuses apart, 400 buses including 300 double deckers of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) run in the city. BRTA says 573 Dhaka-bound buses regularly use 19 routes from Gazipur, Savar and EPZ area, plus at least 500 staff buses of different organisations.

BRTA officials say many buses run without route permit. Some transport traders have just applied for route permit and are running buses before they get approval.

Minibuses have once again flocked the streets causing severe traffic jams.



"They don't want to wait," an official says.

BRTA says the authorities banned about 1,100 buses more than 20 years from city roads two years ago, leading to a public transport crisis and inter-city buses were allowed to run to fill the vacuum.

Importers then brought in new buses replacing inter-city ones. Also, rickety buses that were discarded bounced back to the streets, changing their chassis and numberplates.

BRTA Assistant Director Sirajul Islam says BRTA issues route permits to applicants after long screening. "BRTA along with the traffic division check vehicles to see their fitness." He admitted that some

buses move without route permit.

The number of bus routes increased to 66 from 43 a month ago. The BRTA assistant director says the DMP traffic division fixes the routes based on its experience. "There is no designated transport engineer or traffic engineer. We have never had expert opinions on the matter," he said.

DTCB is preparing a strategic transport plan (STP) to ease traffic jam. A senior DTCB official says the STP is an interrelated plan that includes different proposals such as subways, elevated expressways and bus rapid transits.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"Only the enemies of the nation can launch this type of barbaric attack."

-- Iajuddin Ahmed
President
Said in a statement on August 21, expressing deep shock on bomb attack on Awami League rally. Source: The Daily Star

"What can I expect when I see my former peons and ticket checkers have become film producers?"

-- M. Iftekharuddin Naushad
Managing Director, Modhumita Movies
Told The Daily Star on August 18, while commenting on vulgarity in local movies at present. Source: The Daily Star

"I am a member of BNP but party members snatched Tk 14 lakh from me."

-- Jalaluddin
Chairman, Baroiyahat Municipality
Said describing ongoing extortion at a meeting on law and order situation in Chittagong on August 19. Source: Prothom Alo

"Prime Minister gets aboard a helicopter and pose for photographs in the name of relief distribution while her ministers, MPs, leaders and activists loot relief goods."

-- Sheikh Hasina
Leader of the opposition and AL chief
Said at a public meeting during relief distribution in Badda area on August 20. Source: Prothom Alo

"Prothom Alo is basically Alu (Potato) which is very suitable for mashing. It should be mashed"

-- Mufti Fazlul Haque Amine
Chairman of Islami Oikyo Jote
Said at a rally on August 19 organised by Bepaul Madrasia Arabia Bangladesh to protest against reports published in the Prothom Alo about madrasa education. Source: Prothom Alo

"I never saw much ado when Heathrow Airport was threatened to be bombed. But big headlines were found when someone made a hoax call as a joke to threat Dhaka and Sylhet airport. These are all done to create unrest in the country"

-- M Morshed Khan
Foreign Minister
Told journalists during the first meeting of Country Promotional Council on August 18 in the country. Source: Prothom Alo