

TORCHING OF SEVERAL ORCHARDS IN JHENIDAH SPARKS PROTEST

Punish culprits, demand betel leaf growers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah.

Betel farmers blocked Dhaka-Khulna highway near Dulalmundia bus stand in Kaliganj upazila of the district yesterday morning demanding immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the culprits involved in torching their orchards.

They staged the protest soon after betel leaves on about one and a half bighas of land were torched at Raigang village of the upazila at around 8:00am.

This was the fourth arson attack on betel-leaf farms in the area in a month. Fire fighting units from Jhenidah and Kotchandpur rushed to the spot and brought the fire

under control.

Locals and the affected farmers alleged that criminals set fire to betel leaf orchards on around 131 bighas of land at adjacent Raigram and Dulalmundia villages in 22 days from February 9, causing damage to betel leaves worth about Tk 5 crore.

The first such attack on orchards on 60 bighas of

land was made on February 9, the second on 20 bighas of land on February, 20, the third on 50 bighas of land on February 22, and the latest on one and a half bighas of land yesterday.

Several such incidents of arson took place in Kaliganj upazila last year, but law enforcers and local administration failed to identify the culprits

involved, locals alleged.

"We have no other alternative but to go for agitation as no action has been taken yet against the persons responsible for setting fire to our betel-leaf farms," said the affected farmers.

Hearing the news, local lawmaker Abdul Mannan, ASP Mostafizur Rahman UNO Anjumanara Begum and Officer-in-charge (OC) Md Faruk Hossain went to Dulalmundia bus stand area at around 10:00pm and assured the agitating farmers of taking steps to identify the culprits within the next 24 hours.

On assurance of the lawmaker and the officials, the betel farmers withdrew the road blockade at around 11:00am.

Around 100 farmers of Raigram and Dulalmundia villages cultivated betel, taking loans from banks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). "Betel farming is the only source of our livelihood. But the criminals set our orchards afire," they said.

Two affected farmers-Nitya Mohan Dutta and Madan Mohan Dutta Raiganj village told this correspondent that they would not cultivate betel further as they incurred a huge loss.



PHOTO: STAR

Worried about the fate of her beloved, wife of a man working in Libya, now turbulent with anti-government movement, breaks down in tears at their Sarkarpara residence in Chapainawabganj town yesterday.

Mymensingh medical students and interns continue strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Interns and students of Mymensingh Medical College and Hospital continued their strike for the second day yesterday.

They went on the strike on Friday noon demanding arrest of some locals who attacked interns and stu-

dents on Thursday night.

The agitating interns and students yesterday said they will continue strike until their demand is met.

Earlier on the day, the MMCH authorities held a meeting with the agitating interns and students. But the meeting yielded no positive results. They also gave a 72-hour ultimatum to arrest the

attackers. Otherwise, they threatened to go for tougher agitation.

Local lawmaker Principal Motiur Rahman, municipality Mayor Ekramul Haque Titu, Hospital Director Brig Gen Md Shahjahan, Principal of the college Prof Aminul Haque, BMA Mymensingh district unit Secretary Dr Md Motiur Rahman Bhuiyan, and officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station Golam Sarwar were present at the meeting.

The attack was made following an altercation between some interns and locals of nearby Charpara area over harassing a female intern by a man of the area on Thursday night.

Immediately after the incident, a group of people of the area attacked the intern doctors and vandalised some hospital rooms.

The intern doctors and MMC students yesterday staged a sit-in in front of the college. Later, they brought out a procession on the MMCH premises.

Following a request of the MMCH authorities and the BMA leaders, the interns agreed to form an 'emergency squad' for treatment of the critical patients.

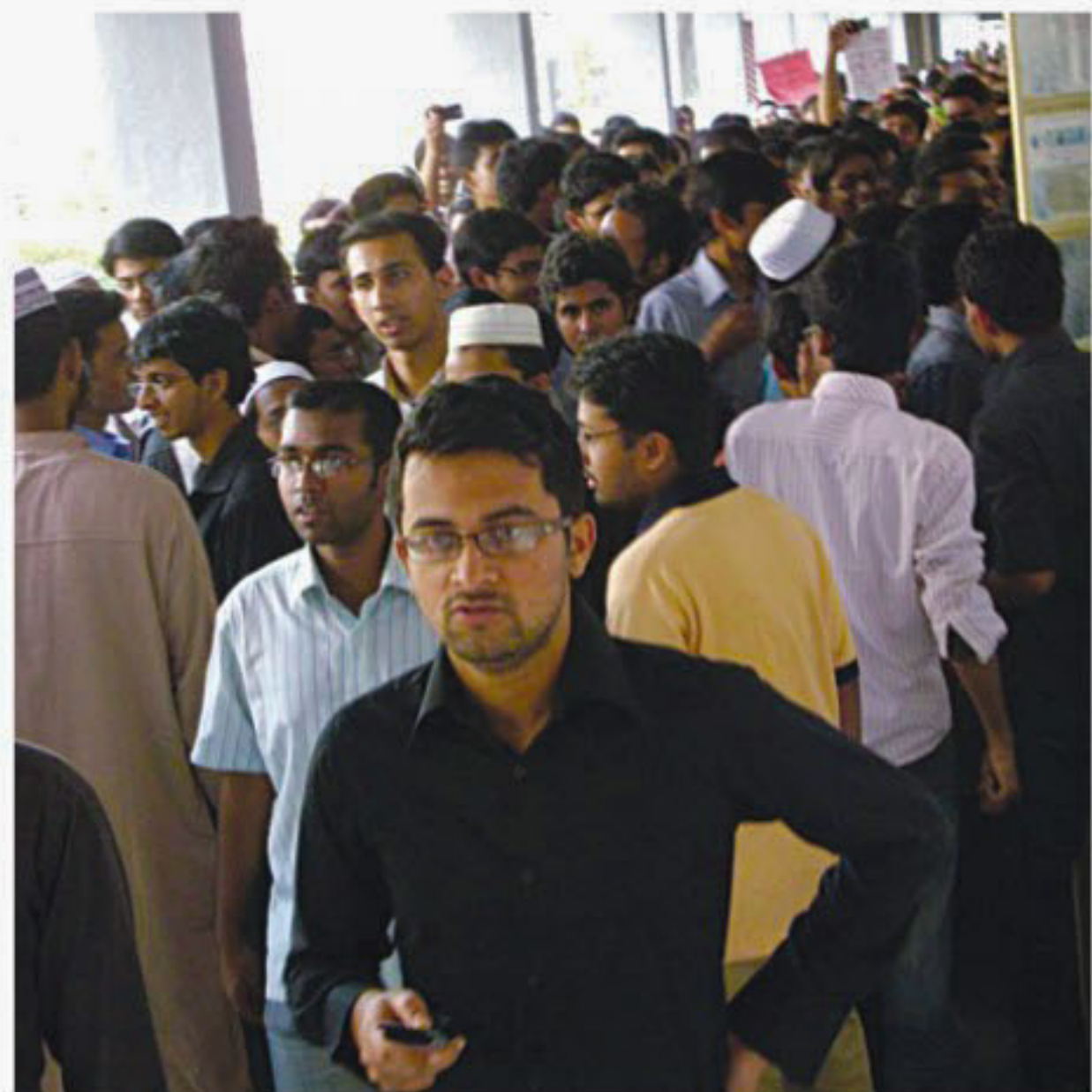


PHOTO: STAR

Interns and students agitate in Mymensingh Medical College Hospital yesterday demanding immediate arrest and punishment of the outsiders who attacked them on Thursday night.

AL man killed as party rivals clash in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

An Awami League (AL) man was killed and at least 20 others were injured as ruling party rivals clashed at Auliapur union parishad complex premises in Sadar upazila on Wednesday.

The victim was identified as Eusuf Howlader, 28, member of AL Auliapur union unit one and son of late Mojibur Howlader of Uttar Auliapur village.

Of the injured, 10 were admitted to Patuakhali General Hospital. They are Shakhawat, 29, Eusuf Howlader, 28, Abul Gharami, 45, Advocate Abdul Jalil Molla, 36, Zahir Khan, 24, Jahid, 22, Kamal Hossain, 32, Kabir Khan, 35, Amir Hossain Talukder, 35 and Sujon, 12.

Local lawmaker saved himself by hiding inside a room of the UP complex during the clash.

Police and locals said, Auliapur union AL

organised a meeting at about 4:00 pm on Wednesday to select party candidate for upcoming UP election.

Golam Moula Roni, lawmaker for Patuakhali-3 (Galachipa and Dashmina) was the chief guest and Md Forkan Sikder, secretary of Sadar upazila AL was special guest.

Two possible party candidates--UP chairman and also joint secretary of upazila AL Humayun Kabir and his rival Shah Alam Sharif, secretary of union AL--came to the meeting leading processions.

At about 4:00 pm Humayun Kabir group attacked Shah Alam group over a slogan. They used sharp weapons and brickbats injuring 20 people.

Of the injured, Eusuf Howlader, who was admitted to Patuakhali General Hospital was first sent to Barisal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College and Hospital and later to Dhaka. But he died on the way at Aricah ferryghat at about 3:00 am on Thursday.

32 fall sick due to 'food poisoning' in Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

At least 32 teachers fell sick after taking lunch at Rangamati Primary Training Institute (PTI) in the town yesterday.

They all admitted to Rangamati General Hospital. One of them named Sharo Bindu Chakma of Maiswari village under Barkal upazila was later referred to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital as his condition deteriorated, hospital sources said.

As many as 60 male primary teachers are receiving training at Rangamati PTI. Of them, 32 teachers took lunch at around 2:30pm yesterday and fell sick soon after having meal.

"It's a case of food poisoning. We will collect food items from PTI and send them for laboratory test," said a upazila health and family planning officer.

"The sick teachers are being given intravenous saline and they will recover soon," Monkya Ching, RMO of Rangamati Sadar Hospital said.

Chairman of Rangamati Hill District Council Nikhil Kumar Chakma yesterday visited the sick teachers and directed the civil surgeon to ensure better treatment for them.

LEADERS FOR REVIVAL OF MARDI CASE

Govt probe, security for her family demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Indigenous leaders and human rights activists yesterday demanded revival of the case for the gang rape of indigenous girl Serafina Mardi of Godagari upazila under Rajshahi district and taking necessary legal steps to punish the criminals.

They also demanded that the government launch an investigation to find out the people responsible for influencing the court verdict following the out-of-court settlement that led to Serafina's suicide.

Failing to cope with the humiliation at the 'settlement' by the community leaders and local Catholic church that the rapists would give Tk 1.4 lakh to victim Serafina's family while the victim was to be wed to Nirmol Murmu, one of the rapists, she set herself on fire on February 17. She died on February 21.

Nine people were accused in the case filed after Serafina, daughter of Cornelius Mardi of Amtulipara in Godagari upazila, was gang-raped on April 4 last year.

But all the accused are still at large while the victim's family gave a 'misleading' statement to the



Serafina Mardi

court following pressure from community leaders.

"If the government ensure security and shelter to the victim's family, they would agree to file case against the rapists," said Prof Dr Mahbuba Kanij Keya, general secretary of Rajshahi University chapter of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad.

"The family is still under pressure of the community who earlier forced them to provide misleading information before the court and settle Serafina's rape case in arbitration," said Keya, who led a group of human rights activists visiting Serafina's village on Thursday.

"There are provisions for reviving the case. The victim's family should play their role. Government

agencies can help them by providing required support," said Dil Sitara Begum Chuni, president of Rajshahi divisional unit of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association.

Jatiya Adivasi Parishad president Anil Marandi said Christian and non-Christian indigenous leaders in a joint meeting held at Kakonhat Degree College premises also demanded immediate arrest and punishment to Serafina's rapists.

At the meeting presided over by Gyan Chandra Majhi, speakers also demanded punishment to the arrested community leaders who illegally settled Serafina's rape case outside the court, eventually forcing her to commit suicide.

A few participants, however, criticised the police for arresting religious and community leaders instead of the main culprits, the rapists.

Rabindranath Soren, Bimol Rajoar, Rabindranath Khakah, Nicholas Murmu, Michael Soren, Rabin Hembrom, Deben Murmu, Nandalal Tudu and Ganesh Majhi also spoke, among others.

Audacity, or else?

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

An Urdu-speaking man, who was arrested in Saidpur town on the night of February 21 for distributing objectionable leaflet, was sent to jail on expiry of two days' remand on Thursday.

Locals caught Shamsher, 38, while he was distributing leaflets containing a few demands including recognition of Urdu as the second state language of Bangladesh.

Police produced the arrestee in the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court on February 22, seeking a five-day remand. The court placed him on two days' remand.

Police and local sources said the same leaflet on behalf of one Afzal Warsi, general secretary of an organisation named 'Indian Origin Urdu Speaking Minority Council', was distributed in different areas of Bihari dominated Saidpur municipality on the night of February 21.

In the leaflet, the organisation also demanded that the names of the Biharis, who were killed during 1971 war, should be published. Police said Shamsher hails from 12/D Purbo Kurmitola camp under Pallabi police station in the capital.

Md Jamaluddin, officer-in-charge (OC) of Saidpur police station, said Shamsher gave important information during remand. But he refused to disclose those for the sake of investigation.

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