

## Senior citizen

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“The certificates would enable the elderly to receive priorities in public and private places, including transports, offices, hospitals, etc,” Social Welfare Minister Enamul Haque Mostafa Shaheed told journalists yesterday.

The minister was addressing a report-launch programme at the Social Services Department auditorium in the capital’s Agargaon.

Titled “Ageing in the 21st century: A celebration and a challenge”, the report was jointly published by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and HelpAge International.

Replying to a query, the minister said it would not be possible to lower the age threshold to be considered elderly from 65 to 60 because of poor economic conditions.

Currently, the country has over 10 million people aged 65 or above.

Ranjit Kumar Biswas, social welfare secretary, said a 28-member committee had already been formed to formulate guidelines for issuing senior citizen certificates.

Out of 15 countries with a population of over 10 million elderly people, seven are developing countries, the report said.

About Bangladesh, it said the elderly population here will comprise 10 per cent of the total population by 2026, which would create pressure on socio-economic factors and slacken the pace of development.

The International Day of Older Persons was observed across the world yesterday, including Bangladesh.

## AL blames

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houses of the Buddhist communities to get first-hand impression of the situation.

Hanif would apprise the premier of the situation today after her arrival from the USA.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir yesterday said the government has information relating to Rohingyas’ involvement in the Ramu and Chittagong violence.

“We are already informed of the Rohingyas’ link with the violence,” the minister said while talking to reporters after inaugurating a training programme at Armed Police Battalion headquarters in the capital.

Mohiuddin said law enforcers had arrested 93 people in Cox’s Bazar and 73 in Chittagong till yesterday morning in connection with the violence.

The law enforcers had been asked to keep vigil in areas where Rohingya refugee camps are situated, he said.

They had been instructed to restrict movement of Rohingyas within the camps so that they cannot contact with local people, he added.

“The government will take stern action under the existing laws against the fundamentalists if they try to spark communal violence,” he told the newsmen.

**AL DELEGATION IN RAMU**  
During their visit, the AL delegates urged people to maintain the country’s longstanding social harmony at any cost and remain alert to the danger of such incidents happening again.

They held a meeting with the deputy commissioner of Cox’s Bazar, and exchanged views with people from all walks of life.

Talking to The Daily Star, Hanif said, “We went to the spot on orders of the prime minister, and we will brief her about the visit tomorrow.”

The AL joint general secretary also said the violence had been committed in Ramu 41 years after the country’s independence.

It resembles the mayhem carried out by Pakistani occupation forces and their local collaborators in 1971, he added.

Hanif said they had assured the victims of all out cooperation with full compensation for repairing the temple and houses.

The other members of the delegation were, among others, AL leaders Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Aminul Islam Amin.

## Please save

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defeated.”

The Mohathero slowly walked into the Sima monastery yesterday afternoon, supported by his disciples. He went from one pagoda to another, and looked at the defaced, damaged statues of Lord Buddha and the nobles in a state of stupor.

He was sweating. He was shaking in pain and exasperation. And he spoke in his gentle, quaint voice.

The Bangalees who had taken refuge in his monastery invented a trick to evade

the Pakistan army.

“I am a China Buddhist,” they would tell the Pakistan army when intercepted. When Bangladesh was at war, China sided with Pakistan. This is why the Pakistan army had great respect for anyone affiliated with China. A China Buddhist was a respectable person and so was to be spared persecution.

“The Pakistanis did not torch our village. This attack is totally out of the blue,” Mohathero says. “This is an

attack on my religion. I have no foes.”

And yet he had to run for his life. When the mob attacked his monastery, his disciples held him on both sides, lifted him off the ground and carried him into the paddy field. That is where he hid the night and survived.

“My civilisation is lost. My lifetime of worshipping has gone in vain. I am a lost man and lost I will be,” he says.

“Please save my future generation! Please!”

## Govt fuelled Ramu violence

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judicial probe committee headed by a neutral judge to probe the atrocities carried out against the minority community and mete out exemplary punishment to the perpetrators of the crime.

The BNP leader was addressing a meeting of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), pro-BNP student body, at a hotel in the capital’s Nayapaltna.

Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir on Sunday accused local BNP lawmaker Lutfor Rahman of inciting the violence, saying the MP neither met the visiting team from the capital nor visited the victims.

Fakhrul questioned how the minister came to the conclusion that the opposition was involved in the mayhem even before any investigation into the matter has been instituted.

He also claimed that the BNP lawmaker (Cox’s Bazar-3) tried his best to stop the violence.

Incensed apparently by a Facebook posting of a photo defaming the holy Quran, a mob destroyed 12 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 50 houses in Ramu upazila of Cox’s Bazar late on Saturday night.

### BNP FORMS INQUIRY COMMITTEE

The main opposition BNP yesterday formed an inquiry committee to investigate the

communal violence in Cox’s Bazar, said a release signed by Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, joint secretary general of the party.

Party’s senior leader Moudud Ahmed MP will lead the eight-member committee that includes standing committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan, Vice-chairman Abdullah Al Noman, chairperson’s adviser Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, Joint Secretary General Salauddin Ahmed, Organising Secretary (Chittagong) Golam Akbar Khandaker, central committee member Goutam Chakraborty and Prof Sukomal Barua of Dhaka University.

**JAMAAT REACTION**  
Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday demanded arrest of Uttam Kumar Barua, the Buddhist who had published photos in facebook and hurt the religious sentiment of Muslims.

The Islamist party also condemned the subsequent attack on minority communities, and the vandalism and torching of Buddhist and Hindu temples and houses in Ramu and nearby areas on Saturday night.

In a statement signed by the party’s acting secretary general Shafiqur Rahman, Jamaat yesterday said they suspected that some leaders of the incumbent government were attempting to implicate Jamaat with the incident.

“Jamaat never commits vile and dastardly acts like the assault on the people of minority community and torching their temples and houses,” said the statement.

The party demanded an impartial and fair probe, and exemplary punishment to the instigator and the people involved in the violence.

## Sept was deadliest month in Iraq

*AFP, Baghdad*

September was the deadliest month in Iraq in more than two years, with 365 people killed in violence that Iraqi security forces are struggling to curb, official figures released yesterday showed.

Insurgents are regarded as weaker than when violence reached its peak in 2006 and 2007, but they remain capable of carrying out mass-casualty attacks across Iraq.

The statistics compiled by the health, interior and defence ministries showed that 182 civilians, 88 police and 95 soldiers were killed in attacks in September.

Another 683 people were wounded -- 453 civilians, 110 police and 120 soldiers, according to the figures.

## Of Black Saturday

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Muslims came and tried to restrain them, in vain. The Bihar went up in flames and Nadarshan slipped into the betel nut garden and hid himself.

**9:00pm**

College student Anik Barua was at the upazila complex after finishing his computer lessons at a shop close by. He saw a procession marching towards Chaumuhuni station. “Slap the Buddhists”, “Burn them down” -- the slogans reverberated through the street. Anik followed them to the square. He was baffled as to why they wanted to kill the Buddhists. There he asked a Muslim boy whom he knew about what was going on. The boy told him about a Buddhist man who had posted something on Facebook that hurt Islam.

Scared, Anik rushed home. He told his family members to stay home.

Then came the first wave of attack; and then the second wave. The mob did not do much other than battering up a few houses. Anik was relieved. He thought it was over. But he was wrong. The third wave came in a much bigger and fiercer form. They torched down houses and the Bihar.

Anik ran for his life into the night.

**9:00pm**

Shapla Barua was doing her household chores when she heard the sound of the processions. Great roars of human voices were coming from everywhere. It seemed they would be upon her any time. Shapla was scared and trembling like a leaf.

She called her mother, who lives in another neighbourhood. Her mother could hardly speak. Her house had been attacked and torched, and she had run into the open field in the darkness. Shapla shivered.

She waited and heard the ominous noise getting louder. There was no electricity. It was dark and yet she could see the skies lighted up. Somewhere the fire was burning. Somewhere somebody’s house or a monastery was being gutted. She shivered in terror.

Then she heard the noise growing even louder and getting closer. The crushing noise of corrugated tins was clear. The attackers were just in front of her house, breaking down everything. She bolted out with her children and ran into the dark field behind her

house.

**9:00pm**

Twenty to thirty madrasa students gathered near the central Jame mosque at Ramu station. They brought out a procession and chanted slogans against the Buddhist and went to Baruaapara.

**9:30pm**

Pragyananda Bhikkhu has dedicated his whole life to the monastery. It was his whole life too. He had heard that Muslims were attacking Buddhist homes. But he had never imagined in his wildest dream that they would attack the monastery. But they did.

They came in a small group. They were using the harshest possible abuses. They threw a few brickbats and went away. But they came back -- this time, with a bigger force.

They started breaking down the locked gate. Pragyananda did not know what to do. But then they were pouring in. He turned around and ran into the backyard.

There he stood still as the marauders torched the monastery. The flames grew bigger, rising in leaps and bounds. He could not stand the flames any longer. He started walking towards the open field and watched the inferno. Inside him, everything had gone cold. He did not feel anything. He only felt that his own family was being slaughtered in his presence.

**10:00pm**

It was a long day for Itimoni Barua at the Ramu Police Station. She had cooked, cleaned and fed the police force. Only then did she come out and was standing at the grocery shop to buy rice for home. From the police station, she was hearing this chaos, but she could not understand what it was all about. Now she saw the angry people chanting slogans: “Slap the Buddhists with shoes”, “Burn them down”.

Itimoni felt something ominous coming. She hurried home where her small daughter was waiting. She was about to start cooking when they came. It was dark and the crowd was a brutal force. They were hitting the tin fence hard with rods and machetes.

Itimoni quietly grabbed her daughter and slipped into the betel nut garden in the backyard. She stood there petrified. She covered her daughter’s mouth with one hand so that she would not cry out loud. At four in the morning, the attackers were gone and she came back to find her

battered house. Itimoni collapsed silently on the ground - unconscious.

**11:30pm**

A group of seven policemen led by the officer-in-charge of Ramu Police Station appeared at Sima Bihar. Anxious Buddhists had gathered there. The OC told them not to worry and go to sleep. A little later, a procession of marauders came, chanting slogans. They went away after battering a few houses. Then came another group. They went away too. And finally came a big group. They started pelting stones and entered the Bihar. They set fire to it and went away. The Buddhists who had fled to the betel nut gardens and rice fields came back and tried to douse the fire in vain.

**1:00am**

Subir Barua has a respected position in Buddhist community at Ramu. He was elected a member of Fatekhar Kul union. Subir was observing gradual developments of demonstrations since 9:00pm from the station.

He was in hiding along with some other community members near the Sima Bihar monastery. Around 1:00am Sunday when two separate processions were coming from the eastern and southern sides of the monastery, Subir could hear the commotion of devastation. He called Shreemad Satyapriya Mahathero, head of the Sima Bihar, to lock the monastery and leave the place quickly.

**1:00am**

Satyapriya Mahathero, 83, felt like a stone. In his lifetime, he has never experienced anything like this. All his life he had preached “All lives on earth be happy”. But tonight, all unhappiness had poured on this little settlement.

In his feeble feet, Mohathero paced around the courtyard of the monastery. He could see the skies lit up with flames. He could hear screams. He could hear but could not believe. Then the attackers came. What could he do? He can walk only when supported by someone. He would die here, he thought. But then helping hands rescued him. Monks carted him to the field beyond the monastery just as the attackers stormed in. He had survived. But his monastery did not. He sat down and wept.

His cries went out to the skies above. To the world around. To humanity. Nobody listened.

## Traders beat

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(Rab) reached the spot around 2:30pm and rescued the DB men.

Traders said a team of about eight DB personnel reached Rahim Market on Mitford Road around 12:30pm and took a bribe of Tk 50,000 from a shop owner. They demanded bribe from two other shops in two nearby markets.

As the news spread, traders and employees from the adjacent markets thronged the Rahim Market and chased the DB team.

Sensing imminent danger, three of the team took shelter at BCDM Bhaban on the road and locked the gate of the market, while the others managed to flee.

The agitating traders damaged a drug store, SA Traders, in the market as its employees give the DB men shelter, said witnesses.

The agitators eventually managed to enter the market. They caught hold of the DB men and gave them a sound thrashing.

Contacted, Deputy Commissioner (Lalbagh) of DMP Harun-ur-Rashid said they rescued the DB men and handed them over to the DB authorities.

He however declined to disclose the identities of the rescued and make any comment about the alleged bribery incident.

Quoting the rescued, he said the DB team raided several drug stores on information that some outlets stored contraband drugs.

Talking to The Daily Star, traders complained that plainclothes DB men conduct frequent drives at the drug stores in which no official from the Drug Administration take part. Last week the law enforcers conducted three drives there.

The traders however admitted to possessing some contraband drugs used in treating cancer and other grave diseases.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach the DB officials over the phone for their version of the incident.

## Punish

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religious establishments and religious minorities are against the spirit of the country’s independence and the Liberation War,” the statement read.

“Such horrific attacks by the extremists are in no way acceptable,” it said.

They also demanded immediate reconstruction of the damaged religious establishments and proper treatment and compensation to the victims.

They sought steps from the government to avert the repetition of such incidents in the country.

The signatories to the statement are Ain O Salish Kendra Executive Director Sultana Kamal, Nijera Kor Coordinator Khushi Kabir Manusher Jonno Foundation Executive Director Shaheen Anam, PRIIP Trust Executive Director Aroma Dutta, ADAB President Rokeya Kabir, Federation of NGOs, Bangladesh President Tajul Islam, ActionAid Bangladesh Country Director Farah Kabir, Executive Director Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) Rasheda K Chowdhury and Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman.

## Train fares

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“We have to increase the fares in line with the gradual rise in fuel prices,” said the BR official, adding bus and truck fares had increased manifold in the last 20 years.

Donor agencies have suggested increasing the train fares to reduce subsidy in the sector.

The previous BNP-Jamaat government rejected BR’s proposal to hike train fares. The military-backed caretaker government in 2008 also refrained from increasing the fares, considering its possible impact on inflation.

Railway officials said successive governments had hesitated to increase the fare, fearing that they would lose popularity.

Railway officials expect to reduce the annual loss by Tk 160 crore due to the fare hike.