

Bloggers baffled

FROM PAGE 1 Bangladesh, had shut down a whole blog based on a few entries.

"When the very government that formed a tribunal to try war criminals takes a position against free-thinking and pro-liberation blogs, then the new generation asks, Et tu, Brute [You too, Brutus]?"

He was addressing a press conference at Shahbagh yesterday afternoon.

In an overnight drive starting around 10:00pm Monday, law enforcers picked up the trio from different parts of the capital for placing "derogatory contents about Islam and Prophet Mohammad (pbuh)" on various internet platforms.

The detained bloggers are Subrata Adhikari Shuvo, 24, Russel Parvez, 36, and Mashur Rahman Biplob, 42.

Yesterday, representatives of the blogging community organised another press conference at Madhur Canteen in Dhaka University.

Baki Billah, online activist and blogger, addressing the news conference said, "The government is increasingly surrendering to the demands and wishes of Hefazate Islam."

Arif Jebtik, another blogger, observed, "The bloggers were not arrested for their recent write-ups. This is part of the conspiracy to label the bloggers of the Shahbagh movement as atheists."

Fahmidul Haq, associate professor of journalism at DU, said, "We have seen that fundamentalist regressive forces are spreading propaganda against the Shahbagh

movement, terming its activists atheists."

Meanwhile, rights groups, students, teachers and political parties expressed outrage at the arrests, arguing that this was a shameless attempt of the government to appease fundamentalists.

The blogging community also organised a human chain and demonstration at TSC and brought out a procession in protest at the arrests. Prominent civil society members, academics, student leaders, bloggers and cultural and political activists participated in the event.

The Bangla department of DU organised another human chain in front of Aparajeyo Bangla. Shuvo is a postgraduate student of the department.

The protesters said if the bloggers had committed crimes, they could have been tried under existing laws of the country. But harassing, defaming and treating them as wanted criminals cannot be accepted.

Communist Party of Bangladesh President Mujahidul Islam Selim and General Secretary Syed Abu Jafar Ahmed, in a written statement, said the arrests were a "gift from the government to the communal forces".

The formation of tribunals against online activists and taking of steps to amend the laws to try them were a regressive attempt of the government, clearly violating freedom of speech, they added.

Facebook and other social media sites were also abuzz with criticism of the anti-

progressive stance of the government.

Shaheed Rumi Squad criticised the Detective Branch of police for arresting the bloggers and letting rioters, murderers and looters run free.

Others urged the Gonojagoron Mancha to take up the arrest of the bloggers as its own issue.

Meanwhile, students and teachers of DU, under the banner of "Dhaka Bishwabidyaloyer Shikhhok-Shikhharthi Brindo" will bring out a procession and hold a rally at Aparajeyo Bangla around 10:00am today to protest the arrests and demand the release of the three bloggers. They will also press for a ban on Jamaat-Shibir.

Govt firm

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Turning to the arson, vandalism and attacks on law enforcers during recent hartals, Ashraf, also LGRD and cooperatives minister, said these were terrorist activities and could not be part of a political or democratic movement.

They were carrying out such activities as "they (BNP-Jamaat) have lost their belief in people and people's strength," he observed.

He urged all democratic forces to get united against the BNP-Jamaat.

Chaired by AL Chittagong city unit President ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, the rally was addressed, among others, by Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon.



Twelve-year-old daughter of Sub-inspector Abdus Sabur cries beside her father as he is being shifted to Rangpur for treatment after Jamaat-Shibir men hurt him severely in the head in Dinajpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Plainclothes cop savaged

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Some of them attacked two motorcyclists and damaged their vehicles.

Hearing about the gathering, constable Shahadat Hossain took Sub-inspector Abdus Sabur on his motorcycle and drove to the spot around 11:20pm, said Debbas Bhattacharya, superintendent of police (SP) in Dinajpur, adding the two were in plainclothes.

Identifying them as policemen, the marauding youths attacked the motorcycle and swooped on the two, said a police source. Shahadat abandoned his vehicle and ran away. Sabur

was left there in a helpless state.

The mob beat him up until he collapsed on the ground. It went on hitting him on the head with broken pieces of bricks, witnesses said.

The assailants then set fire to the motorcycle.

Even when the SI passed out, profusely bleeding from the head, six to seven Shibir men continued striking him on the head with bricks, local people said.

Everything happened in five to seven minutes before 25 armed policemen, who were on patrol about two

kilometres from the scene, hurried to the scene and dispersed the attackers, firing rubber bullets. Constable Shahadat had informed the police team about the attack on Sabur.

The 25-minute-long clash between the police and Jamaat-Shibir men, which followed the attack on Sabur, left at least 14 policemen injured. Three Jamaat-Shibir men received rubber bullets.

Sabur underwent surgery conducted by ATM Zillur Rahman for one and a half hours at Dinajpur Medical College Hospital before he

was shifted to RMCH at around 2:33pm.

Meanwhile, police recovered a body from a paddy field at Hajimor village around 3:00pm. The dead was identified as Azimuddin, 56, a bicycle repairer of the area.

Police suspected that he might have died due to a cardiac arrest during the melee.

No marks of injury were found on the body, said Tariqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Chiribandar Police Station.

Tension was still prevailing in the area, the OC said.

Three bloggers arrested

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Hours after the arrest, they were each placed on a seven-day remand in a case filed for making disparaging comments about Islam and the Prophet.

The arrests, however, could not appease Hefajat-e Islam which, together with other radical Islamist groups, has been campaigning against the Shahbagh protests.

Terming the three "not well known," the Islamist group in a press release last night demanded action against the "real culprits".

Meanwhile, news of the arrests sparked strong criticism of the government on the social media too, with bloggers, rights groups and online and political activists describing it as "an attack on freedom of speech and an insult to democracy".

"We condemn the arrests and demand their immediate release," Sushanta Das Gupta, one of the founders of Amar Blog, told The Daily Star.

Describing the arrests as "sad and shameful," blogger Abu Mustafiz said the government had arrested them as they had been writing about the government's "dubious role" over the Gonojagoron Mancha.

"The government accepts only what it likes and rejects what it dislikes. This cannot be accepted," he told this correspondent.

Dhaka University students and different organisations also protested the arrests and formed human chains at different places, demanding their immediate release.

Meanwhile, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed told newsmen that the government was planning to toughen laws to punish those hurting the religious sentiments of the people.

The three bloggers were detained in separate raids from 10:00pm on Monday to 4:00am yesterday, Mollah Nazrul Islam, deputy commissioner (DC) of Detective Branch of police, told a press briefing.

Shuvo was arrested near Jagannath Hall, Russel at Monipuripara and Biplob at Pallabi, he said, adding that detectives also seized their laptops and desktop computers.

The detectives, however, would not give any details as to what "derogatory contents" the bloggers were made accused of.

But going through some of the contents written by them, some sources claimed that they had made certain comments regarding the

Prophet, his relationship with Hazrat Khadija and also about Ramkrishna Paramahansa.

If convicted, they face up to two years in jail.

Asked, the DC said they were yet to be sure whether the arrestees were involved with any political parties or with the Gonojagoron Mancha, although the bloggers and activists of the Shahbagh protests claimed that they were involved with the movement.

Fahmidul Haq, an associate professor of mass communication and journalism at DU, told a press conference at Madhu's Canteen that Russel Parvez was actively involved with the Shahbagh movement while Shuvo and Biplob were online activists of the movement.

According to detectives, Shuvo, who hails from Laxmipur, used to write on several blogs, including somewhere in..., Amar Blog and Istition using the pseudonyms Sada Mukhosh, Azad, Subrata Subho and Lalu Kasai.

Biplob, a resident of Pallabi in capital's Mirpur, used to write under the online pseudonym Allama Soytan on Facebook, Soytan Nagorik on somewhere in..., Soytan on Nagarik and Nemesis on Amar Blog.

Russel, who lives at Monipuripara, used to write under the name of Rasel Pervez on Amar Blog and under the name of Rasel and Opobagh on somewhere in.

On March 31, a group of Muslim clerics submitted to the government a list of bloggers who they thought were involved in writing derogatory comments about religion.

It was not immediately clear if the three were on that list.

Earlier, the government asked the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission to set up a monitoring cell for blocking instantly the blogs that carry derogatory contents about Islam and the Prophet.

LAW MINISTER'S BRIEFING

The government plans to amend the related laws to increase the punishment for those hurting people's religious sentiments through their writings in newspapers and social media, said the law minister.

"Already, we have decided to set up two cyber crimes tribunals in Dhaka and Chittagong to try those accused of these offences. And such tribunals will

gradually be set up in all divisions of the country," he said at a press conference at Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry.

He added that the government had taken steps to try the newspapers that had misled people by publishing distorted pictures of the Gilaf (cover) of Holy Kaba.

Hall-Mark

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Khurshid Alam Khan told this correspondent yesterday.

The nine were on the bank board during the Hall-Mark loan scam last year, he mentioned.

The ACC served notice on them on April 1 asking for their wealth statements.

They are former chairman of the board Kazi Baharul Islam and members Subhash Chandra Singha Roy, M Anwar Sahid, ASM Nayeem, KM Jamal Romel, advocate Satendra Chandra Bhaktha, M Shahidullah Miah, Kasem Humayun and Saimum Sarwar Kamol.

The other two served with notice are General Manager of the bank Nani Gopal Nath and Assistant General Manager M Khurshed Alam.

Contacted, Subhash said they have received the notice and would submit statements in time.

Nuke power

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loan deal with Russia to implement the first phase of the project.

The study and survey on primary safety of the project area have already been completed for getting assistance from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Russian Federation, according to the planning ministry proposal.

The IAEA has been providing technical assistance for developing atomic infrastructure.

The ECNEC also gave the nod to the construction of Shahjibazar 300 MW Combined Cycle Power Plant at a cost of Tk 2,844 crore, of which Tk 1,946 crore will be provided by the bidder as buyers' credit at an interest rate (London Interbank Offered Rate) of 3.5 percent.

The Chinese firm JVCA of Guangdong Power Engineering Corporation and Guangdong Electric Power Design Institute has already won the bidding for the project.

The meeting also approved six other projects worth Tk 1,412 crore.

FROM PAGE 1 dusk shutdown in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions today demanding the release of its chief Delwar Hossain.

The ongoing HSC and equivalent examinations, however, will remain out of the purview of the hartal, said an unsigned email from Shibir.

Six compartments and the locomotive of the Chittagong-bound Turna Nishitha Express veered off the railway tracks at Shrimantapur in Comilla Sadar (South) upazila around 4:35am, 10 minutes after it left Comilla railway station, reports a correspondent.

At last 30 passengers sustained injuries in the derailment, which snapped rail communications between Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Sylhet and Dhaka-Mymensingh routes for the 15 hours till 7:00pm.

The injured received first aid at local hospitals.

The schedules of several train services, including those of Prabhati Express (Dhaka-bound train from Chittagong) and Paharika Express (Sylhet-bound train from Chittagong), were cancelled, causing sufferings for hundreds of passengers.

Police arrested 17 Shibir

activists and seized some Jihadi books from their possessions at Changini master mess at Kotbari, suspecting their involvement in the derailment, said Ainul Haq, officer-in-charge of Sadar Dakkhin Model Police Station.

"We have information that they [arrestees] removed the fishplates," he said.

On Monday night, Jamaat-Shibir men through an announcement on their Facebook page "Basher Kella" cautioned people not to travel by train in the next 48 hours, saying they had completed removing fishplates on railway tracks.

Railway sources said around half an hour before the derailment, a train passed on the same railway track in the area without trouble.

Four compartments of the train were seen tilted near a paddy field while the rest of its compartments, including the locomotive, were grounded on the other side of the field.

Relief trains from Laksham and Akhaura rushed to the spot and conducted the salvage operation. Two local trains took the passengers to their destinations.

Man shoots tree

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No, this isn't an April Fools' Day prank playing on the much-maligned M. Night Shyamalan film "The Happening."

An Iowa man is expected to survive but will have one heck of a story to tell after he fired his pistol at a tree only to have the shot ricochet and impact upon himself.

The 27-year-old Logan Bunn transported himself to a nearby hospital in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Allamakee County Sheriff's Office says the incident happened at about 4:30am on Sunday morning.

In the ongoing war between man and nature, many more trees have fallen at the feet of their human counterparts. But there have been notable exceptions. Last month, an Illinois man was killed when he was attempting to cut down a tree fell upon him.

And on Christmas Day 2012, a Houston man was killed when he was attempting to clear a fallen tree from the street outside his home. During the removal effort, a second tree fell on him, causing the fatality.

Myanmar school fire

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voicing suspicions the fire was started deliberately.

A teacher, who was awoken as flames tore through the building and who helped evacuate survivors, told AFP he had smell petrol during the blaze -- echoing the testimony of several witnesses.

"I think someone started the fire intentionally," said Khin Maung Hla, 35, adding the victims were aged between 12 and 15.

Emergency services had to break down locked doors to free the children sleeping in a dormitory, according to government spokesman Ye Htut.

Communal tensions are high in the former army-ruled country after at least 43 people died last month in a wave of intra-religious violence that saw mosques and homes burned down in several towns.

The government has imposed emergency rule and curfews in some areas.

Yangon's chief minister Myint Swe told reporters authorities had launched a probe into the fire, adding that initial findings suggested a fault with wiring under the staircase was to blame.

He said about 70 children were trapped upstairs when the blaze broke out.

"The children could not get out of the building because there were iron bars (on the windows) and the only way out was the stairs," he said, adding that the victims died of suffocation.

Electrical fires are common because of poor safety standards in poverty-stricken Myanmar, which is emerging from decades of military rule.

Myint Swe said witness reports of a smell of fuel could be explained by the generator used to power the building.

Muslim leader Shine Win told AFP earlier that he had spoken to students and teachers who reported slipping on an

oily liquid on the ground floor while escaping, and urged the government to "reveal the truth".

US ambassador Derek Mitchell in a statement expressed "heartfelt condolences" to the loved ones of all those affected. Yangon has been tense but mostly peaceful following the religious clashes which broke out in the town of Meiktila and later spread.

The conflict poses a major challenge for President Thein Sein, who has won international praise for his reform efforts since taking office two years ago.

The situation has calmed in recent days after the former general on Thursday vowed a tough response to the violence, which he blamed on "political opportunists and religious extremists".

Violence involving Buddhists and Muslims in the western state of Rakhine last year left at least 180 people dead.

N Korea

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Korean peninsula crisis could spiral out of control.

"Nuclear threats are not a game," Ban said, responding to a series of aggressive statements by Pyongyang that have prompted the deployment of nuclear-capable US B-52s, B-2 stealth bombers and a US destroyer to South Korea.

The North's announcement earlier that it would reopen Yongbyon reactor -- its source of weapons-grade plutonium -- triggered international alarm with Pyongyang's only major ally China voicing regret and calling for restraint.

A Pyongyang government nuclear energy spokesman said the aim of the move was to "bolster the nuclear armed force both in quality and quantity."

The Korean peninsula has been caught in a cycle of escalating tensions since the North's February nuclear test, which followed a long-range rocket launch in December.

Subsequent UN sanctions and annual South Korea-US military exercises have been used by Pyongyang to justify a wave of increasingly dire threats against Seoul and Washington, including warnings of missile strikes and nuclear war.

The UN secretary general called for calm.

"The current crisis has already gone too far," the former South Korean foreign minister told a press conference in Andorra.

The North shut down the Yongbyon reactor in July 2007 under a six-nation aid-for-disarmament accord, and destroyed its cooling tower a year later.

It was the sole source of plutonium for the nuclear weapons programme.

Experts say it would take six months to get the reactor back up and running, after which it would be able to produce one bomb's worth of weapons-grade plutonium a year.

Kim Yong-Hyun, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Dongguk University, said the nuclear initiative was in a different league from the military bluster of recent weeks.

"This goes beyond mere provocation. It's a strong, tangible move and perhaps the one that will force the US into the direct dialogue Pyongyang wants," Kim said.

The prospect of North Korea on a joint plutonium and uranium enrichment path is a hugely worrying one for the international community.

The North has substantial uranium ore deposits which provide a quick route to boosting reserves of fissile material, while plutonium has the advantage of being easier to miniaturise into a deliverable nuclear warhead.

Many observers believe the North has been producing highly-enriched uranium in secret facilities for years, and that the third nuclear test it conducted in February may have been of a uranium bomb.

Its previous tests in 2006 and 2009 were both of plutonium devices.

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But the tough talk has yet to be matched by action.

"Despite the harsh rhetoric we're hearing from Pyongyang, we are not seeing changes to the North Korean military posture, such as large-scale mobilisations," said White House spokesman Jay Carney.