



Polytechnic students block the capital's Mirpur Road yesterday, demanding timely promotion and withdrawal of a government provision that classifies entry-level jobs for diploma engineers as "supervisor". Chased by law enforcers, they vandalised several vehicles at Dhanmondi -27.

PHOTO:
PALASH KHAN

Polytechnic students go on rampage

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demands, the students will lay siege to the Secretariat tomorrow, and press forth their demands to the secretaries of public administration, public works, education and finance.

In the wake of the protests, Abdul Mannan Khan, state minister for the housing and public works, will sit with the president and vice-president of the Institute of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh at 2:00pm today. Students, teachers and diploma engineers under the banner of Bangladesh Diploma Engineer Peshajibi Chhatra Shikkhak Sangram Parishad have been demonstrating across the country for the last one week.

Talking to The Daily Star, Khondoker Mainur Rahman, member secretary of the parishad, said the students boycotted exams and staged peaceful demonstrations but police swooped on them without any provocation.

He said apart from the two-point demand, the students had a few more issues, including increasing their stipends and intern fees.

In Dhaka, demonstrations erupted in front of Tejgaon Polytechnic Institute when around 1,000 students of different institutes gathered there around 8:30am yesterday.

After half an hour, a running battle began with law enforcers when the agitating students tried to block Satrasta intersection.

The students vandalised at least four vehicles on the road, said Biplob Kumar Sarker, deputy commissioner (Tejgaon division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Police fired several tear-gas shells. They foiled an attempt to block Manik Mia Avenue around 11:00am.

The agitators blocked Road 27 in Dhanmondi and vandalised 15 vehicles around 1:20pm, said Masud Karim, officer-in-charge of Dhanmondi Police Station.

Students of Comilla Polytechnic Institute took to the streets in Sadar (South) upazila from 12:10noon and torched a police van and the car of the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) in Kotbari area of Sadar South upazila yesterday.

At least 22 people, including eight policemen, were injured when students with firearms, brick chips and bamboo sticks attacked the law enforcers, said witnesses and police.

Police fired 100 rubber bullets.

A group of students set fire to the land office in Bijoypur in Comilla. Another group locked up the UNO in Kotbari Tahsil Office for around three hours.

In Barisal, two passengers, a driver and a conductor were injured as students vandalised a BRTC bus in Barisal.

Activists of pro-ruling Awami League organisations Chhatra League, Jubo League and Sramik League allegedly were locked in clashes with students in Jessore while motor workers beat up three students in Thakurgaon for vandalising eight vehicles.

In Jessore, police, motor workers, Chhatra League, Jubo League and Sramik League activists swooped on demonstrating students after the students wrecked four vehicles.

Thirty people were injured as the ruling party men hacked away at and beat up students around 1:00pm. Journalists covering the incident also came under attack.

The unruly activists assaulted the principal of Jessore Polytechnic Institute in his office.

The party activists also vandalised the two polytechnic institutes and 10 student dormitories, alleged witnesses.

In Patuakhali, at least 100 people, including students, police and journalists were injured as students of Patuakhali Polytechnic Institute clashed with law enforcers on the road in

front of their campus around 9:30am.

The clash ensued when police resisted a group of polytechnic students from vandalising vehicles on the road, said Manirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Patuakhali Sadar Police Station.

The students pelted police with brick chips. In retaliation, police fired gunshots and rubber bullets in the air, lobbed teargas canisters, and arrested 12.

In Chandpur, demonstrating students clashed among themselves following an altercation about who would lead the protest, leaving 10 wounded.

In Kishoreganj, at least 30 people, including 12 policemen, were injured when students collided with police.

At least 20 people were injured, including a sub-inspector, in a clash that was triggered when police tried to remove a blockade by student on the Sirajganj-Kazipur highway while 13 policemen were hurt in a fight in Sherpur.

Reports of violence also came from Satkhira, Jhenidah, Rajshahi and Chittagong, while students in Bhola, Narshingdi, Dinajpur, Munshiganj and Moulvibazar demonstrated to press home their demand.



Send team to watch polls

FROM PAGE 1
participated by all parties.

On August 23, he called and talked with the Prime Minister as well as the Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia urging them to hold talks for a peaceful resolution of the ongoing political crisis.

According to a press release of the office of the UN secretary general's spokesperson, Ban Ki-moon and Hasina discussed the situation in Bangladesh and the parliamentary polls.

The UN press release said the secretary-general appreciated Bangladesh's achievements and its leadership on the Millennium Development Goals.

"Ban also expressed deep gratitude for the country's significant contribution to United Nations peacekeeping and praised the Prime Minister's leadership in promoting the empowerment of women."

Reports from agencies said the prime minister informed the UN chief about her government's relentless efforts for socio-economic development of the country as well as consolidating the democratic process.

"We want to put in place

a system where the election will be held in a free, fair and neutral manner and power will also be handed over peacefully," she said. "We have to begin the task of upholding the democratic process from a certain stage."

The prime minister said she was ready to make any sacrifice for the nation. If the main opposition BNP wanted elections, it should submit a proposal in parliament about the polls-time government, she said.

She also told the press conference that she did not have any problem having tea with Khaleda Zia.

"I like tea and I've no problem about having tea with Khaleda Zia...we've always been flexible time and again for the welfare of the country's people, although the opposition leader, her sons and cabinet members tried to kill me through a grenade attack on August 21, 2004," she said in reply to a question on whether she would be a bit flexible ahead of the election.

"Is there anyone in Bangladesh who is more flexible than me?" she asked at the press conference held at the

Bangladesh Permanent Mission in New York.

She said, "The people of Bangladesh had to suffer colossally during all elections over the last 38 years. They [BNP-led governments] made the election a farce by capturing booths, distributing money and employing hooligans."

In different forms, like a military coup, caretaker government and army in civil administration, they tried to disrupt the election procedure, she added.

She said her government had established the voting rights of the people so that power was transferred through a constitutional and democratic process.

In this regard, she called upon the people to exercise their voting rights keeping in mind the future of the nation.

Sheikh Hasina said her government had amended the constitution to put a stop to the culture of illegal state power capture in the name of martial law, emergency and military-backed government.

She noted that the transfer of power in Bangladesh had never been held in a peaceful manner, except in 2001

when the Awami League was in power. Elections were free and fair only during the 1996-2001 period when the Awami League was in office, she said.

Replying to a question, the prime minister told the press conference that she called upon the leader of the opposition for dialogue on the issue of holding the next general election.

The Awami League decided to discuss the adjourned motion of the BNP which they placed in the Jatiya Sangsad on a polls-time government. But the BNP leader later withdrew it with an ill motive, she said.

In this regard, she reiterated her call to the leader of the opposition to place their proposal in parliament and let the people of the country to know what they actually wanted.

Meanwhile, Hasina thanked the UN Secretary General for appointing a battalion of Bangladeshi peacekeepers to a new peacekeeping mission of the United Nations in Mali.

The prime minister also called upon Ban Ki-moon to appoint the Bangladeshi peacekeepers to higher posts at the UN.

CONTEMPT LAW SC full bench to hear govt plea for stay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court's chamber judge sent a government petition to its full bench yesterday, seeking a stay order on the High Court verdict that declared the contempt of court law void and unconstitutional.

Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain also fixed October 3 for the bench to hear the stay petition.

Following a writ petition, the HC on Thursday scrapped the Contempt of Court Act 2013, saying that its provisions had curtailed the constitutional power of the highest court of the country.

The law enacted on February 19 exempted journalists and government officials from contempt charges.

The attorney general's office yesterday filed the petition with the apex court seeking a stay order on the HC verdict.

Moving the petition, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told the chamber judge that the government would file a leave to appeal petition with the apex court, challenging the HC verdict after receiving its full text.

He prayed to the judge to stay the HC verdict until a leave to appeal petition is heard by the apex court.

Ramu, stories of the dark

FROM PAGE 1
fear. Uttam Barua's father breaks into tears. Hardly anyone pays attention to the pain that eats away at him.

What happened to the Buddhist community last year was but a lengthening of the sinister shadows that have regularly come over the religious minorities in Bangladesh. In a free, professedly secular Bangladesh, it was not supposed to be this way, for it was Bangalee nationalism which propelled the masses, in the brief five years between 1966 and 1971, toward the attainment of a non-communal political entity. It was supposed to be a nation for all Bangalees—across caste, creed, politics and social standing.

Given what happened in Ramu, given the ferocity with which communalism is being fanned in the country, the fear holds that a land of communal harmony has lost touch with its founding principles.

The facts are revealing of the reality. The Hindu population of the country is on a decline. Something is happening, quietly and imperceptibly, to push the community out of the country, into countries beyond our frontiers. The pattern, of course, was set through the partition of 1947, when millions of Hindus and Muslims left ancestral homes because of their faith. Tens of thousands lost their lives, on the eastern and western ends of what till

then constituted British-ruled India.

Thereafter, a fresh bout of communal disturbances in 1950 forced another large group of Hindus to leave East Bengal for India. In that group were some of the very best of the community — teachers, artists, upcoming writers. In a communal Pakistan, it was made clear non-Muslims had little or no place.

Fast forward to 1964, when the chaos at the Hazratbal shrine in distant Kashmir encouraged the Ayub Khan-Monem Khan clique here in a yet to be Bangladesh to fan the flames of a fresh new communal riot. Thousands of Hindus who had braved the chaos of the 1950s did not feel confident enough to stay back in a country that had historically been home to them. They left. Among them were, once more, many of the brightest of men and women in the community. Their departure left a gaping vacuum — and a gaping wound — in our nationalistic conscience.

The India-Pakistan war of September 1965 led to a further exodus of Hindus from this land. The ruling circles of Pakistan then committed a most despicable deed — they fashioned the infamous Enemy Property Act to prevent any Hindu from legally dispensing with his possessions and moving on. In time, in Bangladesh, a euphemistic turn was given to the ques-

tionable law. It became the Vested Property Act. When today the Hindu community demands changes to the law, the bureaucracy squirms.

The legacy of communism continues to eat away into the vitals of this nation. The country's Christians are a depleted lot; its Buddhists, for all the renovation of temples and monasteries in Ramu and Ukhia, do not believe they can trust their Muslim neighbours or the state any more. Despite the foreign minister's inexplicable assertion that there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh, the truth remains, and remains bitter: everything is being done to deprive our indigenous population of traditional rights to their hearths and homes and to their culture. The hills were once their home. Today the hills are a nightmare they live through.

A few days ago, a middle-aged Muslim cleric, in an enthusiastic sermon at a milad, prayed that the Almighty turn all Hindus, all Christians and all Buddhists of Bangladesh into Muslims. His audience nodded in approval.

It was a worrying sign of how history and heritage could mutate into all-encompassing fanaticism. It evoked dark memories of the destroyed Buddhas at Bamiyan at the hands of the Taliban, of the razed Kali Mandir at Suhrawardy Udyan per courtesy of the Pakistan army.

Despite setbacks, garment to rule

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ranked Bangladesh among the top three country hotspots as opposed to more than 80 percent in the previous edition of the survey conducted in 2011.

"Nevertheless, Bangladesh remains the number one alternative to China," McKinsey said on the study, "The global sourcing map—balancing costs, compliance and capacity."

McKinsey surveyed leading apparel buyers in Europe and the US, who are responsible for an annual total sourcing value of \$39 billion, and found that they plan on increasing their sourcing share in Bangladesh through 2020, despite the ongoing debate over safety issues and political developments in the wake of disasters.

Some 86 percent of the survey respondents ranked labour cost advantage among the three most important reasons for sourcing in Bangladesh.

"Capacity, productivity and supplier capabilities are also critical factors—and Bangladesh still has a huge advantage in these new areas over other promising destinations."

The prospective destinations will have to be able to guarantee potential buyers that they can take on large volumes, are able to deliver against expectations and will provide the long-term investments necessary to secure success.

"Based upon our experience, it is unlikely (in many cases) that promising alternative sourcing destinations would be able to take on any

sizeable share of the export market within the next five years," McKinsey said.

The respondents, who are chief purchasing officers (CPOs) of 29 European and American brands, also said they are devoting more attention to compliance issues in the aftermath of the tragic events in Bangladesh.

"Questions of fire and building safety have replaced infrastructure as the number one key concern of CPOs regarding sourcing in Bangladesh."

Nearly 50 percent said they will likely or definitely revise their supplier base in the country. And the compliance situation in Bangladesh has also had a broader impact on auditing standards for other low-cost sourcing countries, the study said.

Although many players

have already shifted larger parts of their sourcing from China to countries with lower labour costs, it will still remain "the largest sourcing market by far".

Atiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the garment makers' platform, said the findings of McKinsey's latest apparel CPO survey are very positive for the sector.

"But, we have to keep the five 'Ps' of power, port, people, politics and place positive to materialise the survey's findings," he said, while stressing on the need for a stable political situation.

"We must remember that the garment business came to us in the first place because of violent politics in Sri Lanka."

The previous edition of the survey tipped the country's

apparel exports to double by 2015 and nearly triple by 2021 to \$42 billion. In fiscal 2011, Bangladesh fetched \$12.59 billion from garment exports, according to data from Export Promotion Bureau.

Meanwhile, Daniel Seidl, executive director of Bangladesh German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which collaborated with McKinsey for the survey, lamented the lack of a national strategy for the garment sector.

"I personally think the knowledge lies within Bangladesh, but still it could not come up with a national RMG [readymade garment] strategy. There is no transparent communication towards the buyers—I do not see any marketing and communication strategy."

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