

Journos come under attack

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The victims said three BCL activists led by Saiful Islam Jemi, joint secretary of Shankarpasha union unit, on a motorbike chased them when they were passing through Sankarpasha union on a motorbike.

At one stage, the newsmen were knocked off their bike in front of the village home of Awami League lawmaker AKMA Awal.

The BCL men beat them up with steel pipes and bamboo sticks, alleging that the two had taken snaps of their clash with BNP activists in the upazila an hour before.

They vandalised their motorbike and snatched their money.

Meanwhile, Labual Haque Ripon, who works for local Bangla daily Somajer Kotha, was injured by Jamaat-Shibir men at Rupdia Bazar on Jessore-Khulna highway yesterday morning, our Jessore correspondent reports.

Ripon said he was going to his office at Basundia on a motorbike.

The attackers snatched his laptop and set his motorbike ablaze.

Journalists in Jessore town brought out a procession and formed a human chain at Daratana intersection protesting the attack.

Our Jahangirnagar University correspondent reports: Ahad Sajal of online

news portal bdnews24.com and Khalidun Ratul of daily Shokaler Khabor were assaulted by police at the JU central playground around 8:00am.

The victims said cops led by Sub-inspector Rakib of Ashulia Police Station chased them when they were covering police firing on some JCD activists.

Police seized their identity cards and tried to force them out of the campus, threatening to shoot them.

Jahangirnagar University Journalists Association formed a human chain on the campus protesting the assault on the reporters.

Meanwhile, Ekattor Television journalist Zakaria Biplob, who sustained serious bomb injuries on the eve of 18-party alliance's 60-hour hartal, is out of danger after glass splinters were removed from his body at Dhaka Combined Medical Hospital (CMH) yesterday.

Zakaria, a newsroom editor of Ekattor Television, along with cameraman Alamgir Hossain was standing in front of the TV channel's office in Gulshan when miscreants hurled the bomb and fled, said Monir Hossain, chief assignment editor of the channel.

Alamgir, who sustained minor injuries, took primary treatment from CMH on Saturday and left.

SUFFERING FOR NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Overseas job seeker Hazrat Ali, second from left, came from Brahmanbaria and made camp in front of Shahjalal International Airport late Saturday night fearing he would not be able to reach the airport at all for his 9:00pm flight to Dubai last night. The opposition enforced 60-hour hartal that began yesterday morning has put many travelers in a fix and some have chosen to get to the airport almost an entire day ahead of their flights.

Businesses in tatters

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possible to make up for the loss in sales for the day," Abu Tayeb Siddiquee, deputy general manager for sales and distribution of Square Consumer Products and Square Toiletries, told The Daily Star yesterday.

They had expected the hartal to be withdrawn after the phone call made by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to opposition leader Khaleda Zia.

These are not isolated cases of entities bearing the brunt of hartals. Strikes take a toll on almost all businesses by blocking the movement of transport and disrupting the supply chain of industrial raw materials, finished goods and farm produce.

Trading activities including retail sales, hotels and restaurants also suffer for the strike, according to businesses and traders.

According to an estimate by Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry,

Bangladesh losses Tk 1,600 crore each day for hartal.

Since January, the nation witnessed 41 countrywide strikes, enforced mainly by opposition BNP and its alliance Jamaat, hurting business activities including overseas trade.

Yesterday, on the first day of hartal, almost all shops in Dhaka city remained closed amid fears of violence.

"We could not send five containers today for shipment because of the strike. We may have to pay the price in terms of air freight," said Asif Ibrahim, vice chairman of Newage Group of Industries that mainly concentrates on garments.

Ibrahim, also former president of DCCI, said the raw materials that were scheduled to come from Chittagong Port failed to come to the factory.

"Our production also suffered today as 20 percent workers could not reach on time," he said.

Hanif falls from Hasina's grace

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his contractual appointment and a GO [government order] has been issued today [yesterday] to this effect," Senior Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder of the Ministry of Public Administration told The Daily Star.

Hanif, also joint general secretary of the ruling Awami League, claimed that he had asked the prime minister to relieve him of his duties as he wanted to take part in the next elections from a constituency in Kusthia.

"And the prime minister accepted my request," he claimed.

Sources said Hasina had removed Hanif on October 11 following an exchange of words at a grassroots meeting on October 9 at Gono Bhaban over Hanif's running in the next parliamentary elections.

At the meeting, the Awami League chief had told Hanif that since he holds a government post and enjoys salaries and other facilities, he would not be eligible to contest the parliamentary elections as per the Representation

of the People Order (RPO).

Hanif then told the premier that he had consulted the Election Commission about his running for parliament and the EC told him that since he was the special assistant to the prime minister, he could run.

She then told Hanif that the EC would cancel his nomination ahead of the polls due to restrictions imposed by the RPO.

A seemingly irritated prime minister told Hanif that he gets honour for being the special assistant to her and that he would have to face the harsh reality if he quits the position.

Hanif went on arguing with Hasina and said he was ready to quit his post.

The day after the exchange of words at the meeting, which many considered was not at all the best place for it, Hasina called two senior secretaries from the secretariat and asked them to bring in necessary files regarding the appointment of Hanif as her special assistant, sources said.

The sources added that the prime minister looked into the files on October 11 and signed the papers the same night initiating the process of Hanif's removal from the post.

Sobhan Sikder said it took time to issue the government order as the files of all contractual appointments go up to the president and then come back to them.

The prime minister appointed Hanif as her special assistant on April 6, 2009. The appointment surprised many Awami League leaders as most of the party grassroots knew him little.

Being in Hasina's good graces, little-known Hanif became the first joint general secretary of the party in July 2009. Hasina deprived many other eligible party leaders in appointing him.

Since then, Hanif played an influential role in intra-party politics as party General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam was mostly inactive.



PHOTO: STAR

Teenager Sumon of Jhalakathi in agony after a homemade bomb he was carrying exploded in his hand, almost severing his thumb, near the residence of the chief justice at Kakrail in the capital yesterday during the first day of the three-day hartal. Photo pixelated as Sumon is a minor.

Teenage 'picket' injured

Bomb goes off in his hand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 16-year-old boy sustained serious injuries as a crude bomb went off in his hand at Kakrail in the capital yesterday afternoon, the first day of 60-hour hartal enforced by BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Police suspect that injured Mohammad Sumon, who claimed to be a waiter at a footpath shop near Kakrail mosque, was a picket himself.

Sumon, who was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) around 2:00pm under police custody, told law enforcers that a tea stall-keeper near his workplace named Rana alias Rony had handed over the object to him.

The object exploded when he tried to open it, he added.

Shibli Noman, assistant commissioner of Ramna division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), told The Daily Star that Sumon might have got hurt while attempting to throw the bomb.

They were verifying Sumon's statement, Shibli added.

Mohammad Ashrafuddin Khan, resident physician of the DMCH, said, "The right palm of the boy was bruised and his internal organs came out through a hole created in the abdomen by the impact of the blast. He also received injuries to his right thigh."

While talking to The Daily Star, Sumon, however, said he had thought the container had food in it.

"When I tried to open the container, it went off," he said, claiming that he had come to Dhaka from Jhalakathi just a few days back.

The abuse of children in politics was widely criticised after Hefajat-e Islam's May 5 rally where young madrasa students were lured, and in some instances forced to participate, exposing them to political violence. Many children were hurt, while others were left in the capital without any food and money.

Yet almost six months later, political leaders again resorted to using children in violent political programmes.

Hefajat warns of civil war

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The press conference, at AB Community Centre at Hathazari, was held to warn the government against passing Qawmi Madrasa Shikkha Kartipakha Ain-2013.

"We won't abide by such a law," Hefajat Ameer Shah Ahmed Shafi told reporters at his madrasa in Hathazari after the press

conference.

"Don't try to control Qawmi Madrasa. There will be a civil war if you do," he warned.

Allegations are that a section of Qawmi Madrasa students and teachers are involved in militancy. But Shafi said those allegations were false.

Hartal violent on first day

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Judge's Court.

An arson attack took place at a Dhaka court around 2:00pm, leaving some documents gutted, sources say.

Law enforcers recovered 17 crude bombs and half a kg of gunpowder from Dhaka University staff quarters at Azimpur.

Pro-hartal activists set ablaze the Lalbagh power office around 10:50pm, fire service officials say.

However, the fire caused only minor damage as employees and locals doused it immediately. They also caught a man on suspicion and handed him over to Chawkbazar police.

An auto-rickshaw driver suffered burns as pro-hartal men hurled a bomb at his vehicle in Shajahanpur.

Tejgaon police have filed a case against BNP leader Sadeque Hossain Khoka and 22 others in connection with an attempt to burn cars in the city on the eve of hartal.

In Joypurhat, all the compartments of two trains were vandalised, leaving at least 70 passengers injured. Four compartments were burned down.

The Khulna-bound Rupsa Express came under attack as it arrived at Joypurhat railway station around 10:20am. Pickets stopped the Chalanta Rocket Mail by putting logs on rail lines in Puranpoil area around 12:30pm, police said.

After the incident, trains of different routes were suspended. However, the rail communication resumed around 2:00pm, sources said.

In Lalmonirhat, another northern district, hartal

supporters uprooted the rail line near Mohendranagar Railway Station and beat up some railway officials.

The BNP-Jamaat men also vandalised two private hospitals in Chandpur and smashed an ambulance in Gazipur, medicine vans in Habiganj and newspaper-carrying vehicles in Cox's Bazar. Usually, these vehicles remain out of hartal's purview.

In Jessore, opposition supporters killed Alamgir Hossain Shimul, 38, general secretary of Noapara Municipality Jubo League.

Witnesses and police said Shimul and his four associates were moving around by a microbus in Noapara municipality area defying hartal. Around 8:30am, they encountered a Jamaat-BNP procession in Ferry Ghat area.

Chased by the pickets, Shimul and his men took shelter in Highway police outpost but could not escape the attack.

Pro-hartal activists, led by Jamaat-Shibir activists, hacked Shimul indiscriminately and cut his tendon. They injured his four aides and set fire to the microbus.

KM Ariful Haque, additional superintendent of police, said they arrested five people in connection with the killing.

Later around 1:30pm, five policemen were injured and a police vehicle was torched by Jamaat-Shibir men at Kuyada Bazar in Jessore sadar upazila.

In Faridpur, a Jubo Dal activist was killed and at least 20, including a Rab official and policemen, were injured in a clash between law enforcers and

hartal supporters in Nagarkanda upazila.

The dead, Maruf Sheikh, 20, was a son of Rabu Sheikh at Minargram in Nagarkanda upazila.

Pickets wrecked three buses on both sides of Nagarkanda bridge and its adjacent areas. They barricaded different points on roads felling trees and burning tyres, sources say.

As police tried to maintain law and order, hartal supporters chased them with lethal weapons and sticks. At one stage, police opened fire, leaving one dead and 20 injured.

In Pabna, a Jamaat activist was killed while five others were injured in a clash between pickets and anti-hartal activists in Muladuli of Ishwardi upazila.

Some 20 to 25 people were injured in different clashes while many houses, shops, vehicles vandalised and torched in the district.

The deceased was Julhas Uddin alias Munnaf, 35, an activist of Muladuli union unit of Jamaat, sources said.

While Jamaat claimed armed AL men attacked pickets at Shekhpara of Muladuli around 11:00am, AL leaders said Jamaat men opened fire and set alight the union AL office.

Explosion, vandalism, road blockade, running battles and arson took place also in 19 other districts where around 520 people, including 40 law enforcers, injured.

Pro-hartal activists damaged at least 45 vehicles and 22 shops, two hospitals, two vehicles carrying newspapers and offices of Awami League and Jatiya Party in different parts of the country.

Clouds hover over hopes

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"They talked for 37 minutes. But the contents of their discussion, which we came to know later, have exposed the increasing animosity between them," said a senior BNP leader on condition of anonymity.

"They argued on some issues that sent a wrong message to people," said the BNP leader.

AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury told The Daily Star that the way the opposition leader talked to the prime minister was utterly frustrating.

During the conversation, Hasina, president of the ruling AL, requested Khaleda, chairperson of the BNP, not to celebrate her birthday on August 15, the National Mourning Day.

"You cut cake and celebrate your birthday on August 15. Don't you remember the face of my youngest brother Russell whom you saw many times when you used to visit our Dhanmondi-32 house?" an AL leader quoted Hasina as telling Khaleda during the conversation.

In response, Khaleda said she wouldn't refrain from celebrating her birthday on August 15. "Won't anyone celebrate birthday if one is born on August 15?" asked Khaleda.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury criticised Khaleda for "refusing to accept" Hasina's invitation to the Gono Bhaban and making "indecent" comments on birthday

celebration on August 15.

Speaking at a press conference at Hasina's Dhanmondi office, Matia said the prime minister's invitation to the opposition leader for dialogue was still valid.

"We are still optimistic about finding a solution through dialogue," said Matia, also AL presidium member.

In the wake of the conversation between Hasina and Khaleda, the ruling and the opposition parties are moving ahead with their plans to gain political mileage out of the prevailing situation.

The BNP might communicate with the AL after the opposition's 60-hour shutdown ends tomorrow, said BNP insiders.

The main opposition party might ask the AL to arrange for a dialogue any time after tomorrow evening, and subsequently postpone its planned agitation to show its sincerity in holding talks, they said.

Acting BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir may phone AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam after the shutdown ends, and set the time for talks between Hasina and Khaleda, said a BNP leader.

If the AL gives a positive reply, Khaleda may call Hasina to hold talks any time between Tuesday evening and Thursday, said the BNP leader.

However, some BNP leaders have been trying to persuade Khaleda not to join talks

with Hasina, said sources in the BNP.

On the other hand, several AL leaders said Hasina might not show interest in holding talks with Khaleda, as the opposition leader had refused to accept her invitation to the Gono Bhaban.

Asked if the ruling party would again invite Khaleda to talks, AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah told The Daily Star, "Why should we? They have rejected the invitation."

He, however, said the door for discussion was still open.

Some leaders of both the AL and the BNP believe there should be talks first at secretary-general level to prepare the ground for a dialogue between the two top leaders.

If Hasina and Khaleda fail to sit together, it would mean the end of all possibilities for resolving the political crisis at the negotiating table, they said.

The ruling and the opposition parties yesterday spoke in favour of their proposals on election-time government.

AL leader Matia said there could be talks on the formation of an all-party polls-time government as proposed by the prime minister.

However, talking to reporters at BNP's Nayapaltan office, Fakhru said the dialogue must be held on a non-party polls-time government, not an all-party government.