

Harsh blow to vendors

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face significant loss as the level of income falls sharply, said MA Kashem, president of Bangladesh Hawkers Federation.

Dudu Mia, 57, was selling woollen goods like mask, socks and winter cap on a footpath at the Abdullahpur intersection in Uttara. His main customers are those who travel between the city and Mymensingh and Gazipur.

"I did not run my business since the blockade had started. But today I could not hold back further as I have to buy rice," he said, adding that he could not do business for 17 days in

November alone.

The place usually bustled with bargaining of people with around 70 vendors, but only 10 to 15 were found yesterday, he added.

For Mohammad Swapam, 27, a fruit vendor at Abdullahpur, blockades came as a severe blow.

He was forced to sell his perishable goods, like oranges and grapes, at a low price but still could not sell much, he said.

Most of the vendors at Sadarghat launch terminal and Kamalapur railway station were also found sitting idle.

Nazrul Islam, a street vendor at Sadarghat, said he

had spent half of his business capital, around Tk 20,000, during the blockades and hartals last month.

"It is very frustrating as my usual income was at least Tk 500 a day. But it is much less than that now," he added.

Zamal Hossain, a street hawker at Kamalapur railway station, said he could sell only one piece of jeans pants yesterday. On average, he usually sold 15 pieces of pants a day, he informed.

Factory owners and employees who supplied the goods to street vendors like him were also facing the same loss as the demand for the products had also reduced, he added.

HT Imam's meeting sparks

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Committee, could hold such a meeting with civil servants after the announcement of the election schedule.

Sources in the ministry, however, said Imam requested some ministry officials to arrange the meeting so that he could not bid farewell to the ministry staff before his resignation.

"We did not know anything about the meeting until this morning when we were informed about this over the phone and asked to attend," said a senior official of the ministry, wishing anonymity.

Asked whether such a meeting could be arranged, Senior Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration Abdus Sobhan Sikder

termed the event as an informal meeting, one to bid farewell to the former adviser.

"He worked with the officials and employees of this ministry for five years. He is an elderly person and cannot go to everyone's room to say goodbye. So, we all gathered at one place to say goodbye to him. I don't find anything wrong in this," he told The Daily Star.

Additional Secretary Sohrab Hossain moderated the meeting attended by around 250 staffs of the ministry. Sweets were distributed after the 45-minute meeting held at the ministry's library room.

Addressing the meeting, Imam asked the officials and employees of the ministry to work together, forgetting their

differences.

"No matter who forms the government, you should keep yourselves above politics and work for the country," he urged them.

He also said that the Awami League government brought many of the ministry officials who earlier were officers on special duty (OSD) back into service.

He made the comment at a time when more than 650 civil administration officials were kept as OSDs who have no other duty except for attending office, signing the attendance register and drawing salary.

Imam could not be reached for his comments on the meeting despite repeated phone calls last night.

Man injured critically

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The 38-year-old engineer works at a private telecom company, Star Link, his colleagues said.

Witnesses said pickets blasted four cock-tails in quick succession there.

Iqbal Hossain, who brought Mokhesur to the DMCH, said, "I was walking through an alley near Titumir College when I heard

three blasts. As I started running away I saw a man lying on the street, groaning and thrashing about his limbs."

Another victim, a youth, was recovered from the same area and was taken to Metropolitan Hospital at Mohakhali with splinter injuries in the shoulder and leg.

His identity was not immediately known.

Govt opens probe

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The government had earlier formed two other committees -- one headed by Nurul Islam, deputy commissioner of Gazipur, and the other by Aminul Islam, deputy secretary to the labour ministry.

The committees will contribute to the investigation from their respective sides, Shipar said.

He was talking to reporters after an emergency meeting with the officials of different ministries and intelligence agencies.

Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, expatriates welfare and overseas employment minister, Advocate Shamsul Hoque Tuku, state minister for home affairs, and Mosharraf Hussain, owner and managing director of Standard Group, also spoke.

Enraged by a rumour that police killed two factory staff, garment workers torched six units of the apparel maker causing a massive damage worth hundreds of crores of taka.

Blockade may stretch

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with the opposition leaders, let alone meeting our demand for holding the parliamentary election under a non-party administration," a BNP standing committee member, now on the run to avoid arrest, told The Daily Star last night.

"We are not sure if Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is sincere about holding a dialogue between BNP and Awami League to find an amicable solution to the political crisis," added the BNP leader.

The BNP senior leader said, "We don't have any alternatives other than going for an all-out movement to force the government to meet our demand."

Party insiders said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia might actively join street agitations at the final stage of the anti-government movement.

However, the opposition might refrain from announcing fresh agitation programmes during UN Assistant Secretary-

General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco's Dhaka visit. The party also wants the schools to be able to complete exams during the three- or four-day hiatus of agitation programmes.

Taranco is supposed to be in Dhaka from December 6 to December 10. He is coming with the UN secretary general's message to the government and opposition urging them to sit for talks and find a solution.

Khaleda is considering Taranco's visit as the "last opportunity" for ending the ongoing political impasse through talks, party insiders said.

Sources said the opposition would go for an "all-out movement" if Taranco's visit failed to end the deadlock. Khaleda might call for "non-cooperation programme" if that was to happen, said party insiders.

Talking to The Daily Star, some BNP leaders said they could call for an indefinite blockade the next time around.

Postpone polls schedule

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He said even though the EC had declared the polls schedule, the prime minister and other ministers were violating the electoral laws by using government facilities for campaign purposes, for making policy decisions and signing agreements.

Meanwhile, 16 top opposition leaders, including Fakhrul, have been sued for Saturday's arson attack on a bus in the capital's Malibagh area that left a man dead.

BNP leaders Mirza Abbas, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Salahuddin Ahmed and Barkatullah Bulu were among the accused of the attack.

At least 15 local leaders and activists of BNP-led 18-party alliance and 25-30 unidentified people were accused in the first information report (FIR).

Zahirul Islam, a sub-inspector of Ramna Police Station, filed the case with the police station early yesterday.

Habibur Rahman, a pedestrian, was killed and five people, including two bus passengers, were injured as the bus rammed a rickshaw after being hit by a petrol bomb at Malibagh Saturday evening.

Citing the case statement, Selim Mia, inspector (investigation) of Ramna Police Station, said the accused top opposition leaders had plotted and funded the attack.

The case was filed two days after Shabbagh police filed a case against Fakhrul and 15 other senior BNP leaders in connection with an arson attack on a bus at Shabbagh that left two passengers dead and 17 others burnt.

Put an end to violence

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Ahmed, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

"We can't just stand by and see the garment sector gets destroyed," he said at a media briefing at the headquarters of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association in the capital.

The business leaders came together at the BGMEA office in the wake of Friday's devastating fire at a garment factory of Standard Group.

At the meeting, they criticised the political parties bitterly for their failure to reach a consensus and find a solution to the country-wide violence which, they said, gave the attackers a chance to execute their plot.

Some of them blamed the law enforcement agencies for failure to prevent the sabotage, the latest blow to the already troubled garment industry, meeting sources said.

BGMEA President Atiqul Islam backed Akram, urging the political parties to take immediate steps to stop violence that has led to lawlessness across the country.

"The violence must come to an end now. If the garment sector survives, its workers,

the economy and the country will survive, as no other sector has thrived in the country," Islam said, adding that the sector can't be a victim of the squabbles between the political parties.

Strong 6.3 quake strikes off eastern Indonesia

AFP, Ambon

A 6.3-magnitude quake hit off eastern Indonesia and East Timor yesterday, seismologists said, but there was no tsunami alert or reports of damage or casualties.

The quake struck at 10:24 am local time (0124 GMT), 351 kilometres (217 miles) east-northeast of the East Timor capital Dili at a relatively shallow depth of 10 km, the US Geological Survey said.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center did not issue any alerts following the tremor in the remote region at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago between the islands of Timor and New Guinea.

600 Hindus killed

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instigating speech.

Yusuf, who is historically known as the founder of infamous Razakar Bahini, an auxiliary force of the Pakistani army during the Liberation War, is facing 13 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide committed in greater Khulna.

During his 36-minute testimony, Sudhangshu said after the proclamation of independence by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 26, 1971, he had joined the local Sangram Committee led by Javed Commander.

"On April 19, 1971, I heard that Shanti Committee [Peace Committee] would hold a meeting at Rampal Auditorium Hall and around 2:30pm, we, locals, went there," said the 59-year-old witness.

Razzab Ali, Mozam Doctor, Moslem Doctor, among others, spoke at the meeting, while Yusuf, as the last speaker, delivered his speech, said Sudhangshu.

Using a derogatory word for the Hindus, Yusuf had asked his followers to annihilate them, said the witness. "This country is for Muslims, not for Hindus. Hindus' property including their women are Ganimater Maal (spoils of war); these can be used by all. There is no offence here," Sudhangshu quoted Yusuf as saying.

Immediate after his speech, Yusuf's men attacked and looted the houses of Jadab Mistri and Krishnadhan Mistri at Rampal, said the witness.

Like other witnesses in the case, Sudhangshu said Yusuf, who was the chairman of Peace Committee in Khulna, had formed the Razakar force and directed them to "annihilate the Hindus".

He said thousands of Hindus had taken shelter at Dakra Kalibari in Bagerhat to go to India, but Yusuf had directed Razakars Razzab Ali and Siraj Master to kill them.

"Following the order, Razakars on May 21, 1971 attacked Dakra Kalibari and killed 500/600 Hindus there. I can say the name of someone who survived the atrocities, Narayan Chowkidar. His house was two miles away from our house," said Sudhangshu.

Replying to a court query, Sudhangshu said, "I learned from Siddique Master and Sahadat Kazi alias Basar Kazi, who had been local Peace Committee leaders, that Razakars had carried out such incidents following the order of Yusuf Shaheb."

Sudhangshu said Narayan on the following day had gone to their house and said it

was not possible to live in the country and thereby all the villagers left the country for India.

In India, Sudhangshu had received training and later taken part in different battles under Sector-9, said the witness, adding that on October 13, 1971, they set up a camp at Ghanashyampur High School in Bagerhat.

On that night, Razakars led by Razzab Ali attacked them, but at one stage, they had to retreat as the place was unknown to them, said Sudhangshu.

They passed the night inside a betel nut orchard. In the morning a local saw them and advised them not to come out, as Razakars had already taken away some freedom fighters and locals to kill, said Sudhangshu.

"Later the man informed us that following the directive of Moulana Yusuf, Razakars had killed seven people on a wooden bridge near Chulkathi Bazar. The man could tell the names of Bijoy Das and Sunil among the victims," said Sudhangshu.

After his testimony, Gazi MH Tamim asked six questions to Sudhangshu before seeking an adjournment and the three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan adjourned the proceeding until today, when the witness would face further cross-examination.

ICT-1

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday deferred recording of testimony of the defence witness in the war crimes case against Mobarak Hossain.

Yesterday was fixed for recording deposition, but defence counsel Tarikul Islam prayed to the tribunal to adjourn the proceeding for two days as his senior colleagues and the witness could not come due to the blockade.

CHANNEL 24 Mahfuz Ullah, secretary general of Centre for Sustainable Development, yesterday appeared before the court complying with the tribunal's last week's order. The three-member tribunal on Thursday asked him to appear before the court.

Following a petition filed by the prosecution to initiate contempt of court proceeding against Mahfuz Ullah, four officials of Channel 24, Zafullah Chowdhury, trustee of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, and Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna, the tribunal issued a show-cause notice.

The tribunal fixed December 24 for hearing their reply.

Dev partners concerned

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United Nations resident coordinator in Bangladesh and also co-chair of the local consultative group, sent the letter last week, said the finance ministry official.

In the letter, Walker said it would seriously compromise the accountability and transparency of the ACC. The letter recommended further reviewing of the amended act.

Mentioning that he forwarded the letter to the finance minister, Economic Relations

Division (ERD) Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told The Daily Star that the development partners expressed concern at the inclusion of the controversial provision in the ACC act.

He said they had earlier expressed the same concern in the meeting of Local Consultative Group.

On November 11, the representatives of the donors, at a meeting with the finance minister at the NEC auditorium, had said the provision would damage the spirit of the ACC.

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