



Easy bike driver Swapan at Khulna Medical College Hospital yesterday. He suffered burns when pickets set fire to his three-wheeler on Monday night. Top right, Dipu Akhtar nursing her brother Amzad, one of the victims of Shahbagh bus arson, at DMCH burn unit yesterday. Bottom right, the body of Abdus Sattar, a madrasa teacher who died at DMCH yesterday. Sattar was severely burned in Patuakhali on Saturday when blockaders torched the battery-run auto-rickshaw he was in.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA/PALASH KHAN

Arson takes another life

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their children or dear ones been burnt? It's my question to the conscience of those who have burnt my brother and others."

Nasima Begum, wife of a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver from Comilla, was seen begging everyone at the High Dependency Unit for blood

because his husband needs it for eight days.

"I have no relatives in Dhaka. I don't have the money to buy him food. How will I manage blood?" she told this correspondent wailing.

"I will not be able to save my husband only because of blood. What will happen to me and my kids?"

Mahbub Hasan, driver of the Bihanga Paribahan bus that was set on fire at Shahbagh, was seen eating rice with lentils. He said, "It hurts when I eat such food. But I have no money to buy quality liquid food."

In Chittagong, a seven-year-old received shrapnel wounds to the forehead when an

unidentified man hurled a crude bomb at a group of kids in the port city's Saraipara area yesterday.

"Belal was playing with his playmates near the house. Someone hurled an object that exploded with a bang and injured my son," said his father.

Violence flares up

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transport workers at Gabtoli Bus Terminal around 12:10pm. Four people were wounded in the incident.

Two bikers were injured when blockaders attacked them with sticks at Shanir Akhra.

Police fired around 20 rubber bullets to disperse the blockaders when they exploded at least 10 bombs at Jatrabari intersection.

A good number of city buses plied the city thoroughfares, though long-haul buses remained grounded.

In Chittagong, covered van driver Mahbub Alam along with his helper Mizan died when he lost control and hit a roadside tree, after blockaders hurled several petrol bombs at his vehicle. The incident happened in EPZ area of Chittagong around 1:40am.

The vehicle, laden with garment items, went to the port city from Fatullah in Narayanganj.

"When we reached Saltgola near the EPZ, they [blockaders] threw petrol bombs targeting the driver and the covered van. Within seconds fire engulfed us and the covered van," said Suman Kumar Das, who was also on the van. He suffered burn injuries.

Mahbub died on the spot and Mizan succumbed to his injuries at Chittagong Medical College Hospital around 6:30pm, said Jahirul Islam, officer-in-charge of CMCH police outpost.

The third victim in Chittagong, Shariful Islam Russel, 22, died when police opened fire to disperse blockaders who were vandalising vehicles at Mandaritola area around 12:00am, said Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Police Station.

Sirajul Islam, the victim's father, said his son was returning home after attending a family programme at Barabkunda.

In Satkhira, 14-year-old Hossain Ali was killed when police and Border Guard members opened fire on blockaders at Sakhipur intersection in Debhata upazila.

Ali, son of Fazar Ali of Atapur village, was a student of Parulia Qawmi madrasa.

Police said they opened fire to clear the blockades put up by Jamaat-Shibir men on the Satkhira-Kaliganj highway around 7:00am.

The blockaders hurled brick chunks at the law enforcers before they opened fire.

Arizul Islam, 16, died on the spot when law enforcers opened fire at the opposition activists in Garabaria area of the district around 8:30pm.

He was a Class-IX student of Hadipur High School.

Around 20 Jamaat-Shibir activists were injured in clashes with police here.

Nur Mohammad, Debhata upazila Jamaat secretary, claimed Ali and Arizul were Jamaat activists.

Tajul Islam, assistant superintendent of police of Kaliganj circle, said Jamaat-Shibir men swooped on them as they went to clear the blockade.

"We've heard two people died," he said, adding that no compliant was made in this regard.

In another incident, Jamaat-Shibir men beat a Jubo League activist to death at Talbaira in Satkhira Sadar upazila.

The dead is Giasuddin, 30, of Itagachha area of the town.

Another Jubo League activist, Nazmul Haque, was injured in the incident.

Nazmul said they were going to Mahmudpur by a motorcycle. When they reached Talbaria, blockaders stopped them and beat them up with iron rods and sticks. The blockaders also torched the motorbike.

In Chandpur, a class-VIII student and an activist of Chhatra Dal were killed and at least five more bullet-hit in a clash with police at Kalibari around 10:30am.

The dead are Siam Mastan, 14, student of Al-Amin School and College, and Tajul Islam Ratan, a master's student of Chandpur Govt College.

Both of them died at Chandpur General Hospital.

Police said they resisted a BNP procession at Kalibari intersection when the opposition men hurled a cocktail at them.

This prompted the police to open fire, said Mahbub Rahman, officer-in-charge of Chandpur Model Police Station.

Sheikh Farid Ahmed, general secretary of the district BNP, claimed both the victims were party activists. He also alleged police opened fire on their peaceful procession without any provocation.

The opposition alliance called a daylong hartal for today in Chandpur protesting the deaths.

Meanwhile, at least 10 passengers were injured as miscreants hurled stones at a running train in Lalmonirhat around 7:00am.

Blockaders also barricaded the rail line on Lalmonirhat-Dhaka route at Mohendranagar in the district in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila for two hours since 5:30am.

In the port city, blockaders removed 126 feet rail of Chittagong-Dhaka railway tracks in Mirsarai sometime after 2:00am, delaying two trains to start off. Railway staff restored the line around 9:00am.

In Narayanganj, blockaders set fire to at least four vehicles, including two buses, and vandalised 12 others, leaving five people injured.

In another incident, the opposition men vandalised a bus and a CNG-run auto-rickshaw at Kuchimora on Dhaka-Mawa highway, leaving five hurt.

Ershad back-flips

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instant political mileage from it.

"We don't trust him [Ershad] for his unpredictable character. But his announcement is positive for our movement. And we will get political mileage from it," a senior BNP leader close to party chief Khaleda Zia told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

BNP Vice-Chairman Osman Faruk said Ershad's announcement proved that there is no atmosphere for a free and fair election.

In a press statement, BNP Joint Secretary General Salahuddin Ahmed welcomed Ershad's quitting the race and urged the government to cancel the polls schedule.

Ershad's U-turn came as a surprise for his party colleagues as they had no prior idea of the decision.

On November 18, Ershad announced the JP would quit the AL-led grand alliance to contest the polls independently.

Many, even JP leaders, now question whether the most unpredictable man in the country's politics would stick to his decision as he had several times changed his mind over participating in the polls.

Kazi Zafar Ahmed, recently expelled JP presidium member, however, said he views Ershad's decision positively and that his "ideological fight" with the JP chairman has seen a partial victory.

On November 23, Kazi Zafar lambasted Ershad for joining the Awami League-led polls-time government, saying the party chairman was "betraying the nation".

Some senior AL leaders, including Suranjit Sengupta and Obaidul Quader, claimed the former dictator would shift his position soon when the seat-sharing deal is finalised.

The JP had sought more than 100 parliamentary seats in the polls to rise as the main opposition party in the next parliament.

The AL had initially agreed on 70 seats but later offered some 30 to the JP and this annoyed Ershad, according to AL insiders.

"This issue will be settled very soon. And Ershad will change his decision before the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers [December 13]," a senior AL leader told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

If an agreement is finalised, some AL candidates may withdraw nomination papers to leave some seats to the JP, AL insiders added.

As the BNP-led opposition alliance is set to boycott the election, the ruling AL has leaned on the JP to make the election credible.

There is also an allegation that Ershad might have sought Tk 1,000 crore from the AL to contest the polls. He, however, rejected the allegation.

Some BNP leaders yesterday said Ershad's announcement would boost the morale of opposition leaders and supporters.

Besides, the opposition camp is cheered up by

the poor participation of political parties in filing nomination papers and the failure of reported government efforts to split the BNP and the 18-party alliance.

Only 20 out of 41 registered political parties filed nomination till Monday. Six of the 20 are ruling grand alliance components.

The number is the lowest since 1991. Even the farcical election in February 1996 was contested by 43 political parties.

Thirty-eight parties took part in the 2008 parliamentary polls, 54 in 2001, 81 in June 1996 and 75 parties in 1991, according to EC documents.

The BNP leaders also said if Ershad finally quits the polls, it will be almost impossible for the government to proceed for the January 5 election.

Even if the JP chief changes his mind a few days later, it will expose the government's desperation to hold the polls anyhow. This will

Fake claim

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originated in her kitchen and that the family had resorted to lying only to avail free medical treatment.

The Daily Star in its second edition corrected the mistake.

During the day, Shirin told the media that she was a garment worker and had fallen victim of the arson on her way to work. She lives in the capital's Demra area.

Banking on this, the print and electronic media published and aired the family's version of the story in their earlier editions which was later corrected.

Around 10:30pm yesterday, Officer-in-Charge of Rupganj Police Station Asaduzzaman confirmed The Daily Star that Shirin had not been a passenger of the bus that was set ablaze in Tarabo around 8:00am and that she had sustained burn injury at home.

On receiving the update, The Daily Star talked to Shirin and her husband Al Amin at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital late on Monday. They admitted that the accident occurred in their kitchen.

Asked why they took refuge to lies, the couple said that on advice from neighbours that arson victims receive monetary compensation they had given police and journalists the false information.

Ministers, advisers using project cars

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after having a government provided car, Faruk Khan said he had taken a sport utility vehicle (SUV) from an LGED project, as his ministry-allocated car was not suitable for visiting districts outside Dhaka.

"I used the SUV for government job outside the capital, but I did not charge for any fuel or maintenance cost," he said, adding that he handed over the vehicle after his resignation as a minister.

Sources said ministers and senior officials put pressure on many officials to have unauthorised vehicles.

Recently, a deputy secretary of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) ministry had been made officer-on-special-duty (OSD), as he declined to provide former minister Mostafa Faruque Mohammad a vehicle from his ministry.

The incident had taken place a month before the minister resigned. The deputy secretary was advised not to provide the project car by ICT Secretary NI Khan since it contradicted with the rules, said sources.

LGED vehicles have also been allocated to eight officials of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), including the PM's press secretary,

assistant personal secretary, three special assistants and one adviser.

Contacted, PM's Adviser Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu said he had been allocated a government vehicle from the PMO transportation pool, as he is entitled to one car and other facilities as an adviser.

He however said he did not know from where the PMO transport pool collected the vehicle.

Talking to The Daily Star, Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said he had been using government vehicle for the last five years.

"As a minister I deserve a car and from where the car is provided is the decision of the transport pool, not mine," he said.

Meanwhile, Gopalganj municipality mayor, Tungipara municipality mayor and Tungipara upazila chairman are too using vehicles of different projects apart from their government-allocated cars.

Tungipara Mayor Sardar Issial Hossain told The Daily Star that he was not using the car for his personal purpose; rather it was being used for the project.

Five officials of LGRD and education min-

istries as well as a dozen of officials of different ministries are also enjoying project vehicles.

Apart from this, LGED had allocated some 22 vehicles for deputy secretaries and senior assistant secretaries. Two members of Planning Commission are also using project cars. Even ex-wives of two LGED engineers have also been using project cars, according to sources.

Former communications secretary ASM Ali Kabir said crores of taka had been misappropriated in the name of using government vehicles, as the project vehicles are mostly misused.

He mentioned a rule that says no official entitled to government vehicle can use more than one government-allocated car.

There should be a specific policy about using government vehicles, he observed.

Seeking anonymity, a senior official of the transport pool told The Daily Star that the pool provides vehicles to different ministries as per their demands.

"When we fail to meet the demands, we manage vehicles from different projects and give those to the ministries," he added.

Deadline

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The Tribunal-2 on November 3 handed down death penalty to Mueen and Ashraf for killing 18 intellectuals during the Liberation War in 1971. As per the relevant laws, the convicts had the right to lodge an appeal against the verdict within a month of delivering judgement.

The duo, both aged 65, were tried in absentia, as the tribunal's efforts to bring them back had failed. Mueen lives in the UK and Ashraf in the US.

Rana Dasgupta, a senior member of the prosecution, told The Daily Star that Mueen had already made a media statement about the verdict, meaning he was "very much aware" of it.

"Even after knowing the next legal procedure, he did not file an appeal within the deadline, so he won't get a chance to file an appeal," he added.

MK Rahman, an acting attorney general, said Mueen and Ashraf would not be "allowed" to file an appeal after the deadline. On extradition of the convicts, Rahman said, "A process is underway through diplomatic channels."

Tajul Islam, a defence counsel for other war crimes cases, said if Mueen and Ashraf were arrested or they surrendered and sought permission of the Appellate Division to file an appeal, the apex court had the discretionary power to condone the delay.

About execution of the verdict, AKM Nasiruddin Mahmud, registrar and spokesperson of the tribunal, told The Daily Star yesterday that they had sent a warrant of arrest along with a copy of the verdict to the police headquarters for necessary action.

The police had sent the papers to the home ministry, which, 10 to 12 days ago, informed the tribunal's registrar office that they had already sent the papers to the foreign ministry, he added.

A senior official of the foreign ministry told The Daily Star last night they had sent the tribunal's documents to the Bangladesh missions in the UK and the US for submitting those to the authorities concerned of these countries.

Corruption stays

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They were responding to queries by journalists at a press conference at the TIB office in the capital.

This year Bangladesh has been ranked 136th among 177 countries. Both Denmark and New Zealand scored 91 points each to top the global ranking jointly.

Among the seven South Asian countries, Bangladesh scored second lowest right above Afghanistan, with Bhutan at the top.

Sri Lanka has been placed in the 91st position, India 94th, Nepal 116th and Pakistan 127th.

In global ranking, Afghanistan stood the lowest while Russia scored one point more than Bangladesh.

The TI had rated Bangladesh in the lowest position in its graft perception report for five consecutive years since 2001.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman said making the Anti-Corruption Commission toothless, ineffective parliament (boycott by the main opposition), parliamentary committees dominated by interest groups, whitening of black money, reckless grabbing of public land and water bodies and government's failure to effectively fight corruption added to the country's poor profile.

The government's move to amend the anti-corruption law to incorporate a new provision (requiring prior approval for suing public servants on graft charges) was unconstitutional and intended to encourage corruption, he mentioned.

About the ensuing general election, he said the TIB believed that a one-party parliament, which might be formed without participation of the main opposition, would not be able to ensure good governance and contain corruption.

The countries that scored lower than Bangladesh included Yemen, Haiti, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, Venezuela, Eritrea, Cambodia, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Burundi, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Nigeria, Iran, Cameroon, Uganda, Laos and Kazakhstan.

The TI survey focused on abuse of power, misappropriation of public fund, grand corruption at political and administrative levels and extracting extra money for public service at executive and judiciary institutions. Data was collected from February 2011 to September 2013.

Bangladesh's score on corruption rating was based on data survey by seven globally renowned organisations, including Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Economist Intelligence Unit, Global Insight Country Risk Assessment, Political Risk Services International, World Bank Country Performance, World Economic Forum and World Justice Project.

Govt spreading

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He said, "Most of the political parties are not participating in the polls, which indicates most of the people will not accept this farcical election."

To resolve the impasse, polls schedule should be postponed and the government should resign and hold the polls under a non-party government, the BNP leader added.

He demanded immediate release of his party leaders and withdrawal of the "false cases" against them.