

RICKSHAW-PULLERS SAY NO TO BLOCKADE



Rickshaw-pullers stage a sit-in at Entertainment Park in Lalmonirhat town, above, and form a human chain in front of the house of Dinajpur district unit BNP president in the town yesterday protesting the weeklong countrywide blockade enforced by BNP-led 18-party alliance as the violent political agitation badly affects their earnings.

Blockade adds to woes of daily bread-earners

STAR NATIONAL DESK

People dependent on daily earning are apparently the worst sufferers due to the ongoing blockade enforced by BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Our Mymensingh Correspondent Aminul Islam reports: Rickshaw-puller Abdul Khaleque, bread-earner of his six-member family, was looking bleakly as his earning reduced to less than half due to shortage of passengers during the last several days.

"Now I can hardly earn Tk 150 a day, even less, although it is Tk 300 to Tk 400 in normal times," he said, sitting on a pavement beside his rickshaw.

"I used to make around Tk 400, which has now come down to below Tk 200, leaving me in serious

crisis to run the family. Can you tell me when this situation is going to change for better?" said Al Amin, a pop corn vendor of the town.

In absence of customers, cobbler Poresh Rishi was sitting idly on a mat on CK Ghosh Road. He has also similar tell to tale.

The small town of Kishoreganj gives almost a deserted look as very few people come out of their houses amid virtual suspension of public transport during the blockade, reports our correspondent Rajib Paul.

All businesses suffer while small earners like street vendors, day labourers and rickshaw pullers bear the brunt during such programmes.

Sohel Mia, one of around

200 street vendors in the town, was eagerly waiting since early morning for a bus to come so he could sell bread to commuters.

"In normal times, hundreds of people tread the bus station at Pulerghat Bazar on Dhaka-Kishoreganj highway as dozens of busses make their stoppages here daily. But not a single public transport came today and I have hardly any customer," said Sohel, the only bread earner of his four-member family.

Rickshaw-van puller Abdul Malek waits in front of Sonali Bank at Rathkhola but finds few people to hire him during the whole day.

"Two days back, I borrowed Tk 500 from my neighbour to feed my family. If I fail to earn today, I will have to borrow again,"



Sellers at makeshift cloth shops beside the road at Basabari in Mymensingh town pass idle time yesterday as there are very few customers amid the days-long countrywide political agitation like blockades by main opposition BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Goods-laden trucks stranded in fear of blockaders

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPIU, Pubna

A large number of trucks, mostly loaded with vegetables, have remained stranded near Lalon Shah Bridge at Pakshey under the district in fear of vandalism or arson by supporters of the ongoing countrywide blockade sponsored by BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Unlike other times, blockaders are now attacking vegetables and raw materials laden trucks and often extorting them on this road, said Md Mojnu Miah, a truck driver.

Md Mamun Mollah, 30, started with a betel nut loaded truck from Mothbaria in Pirojpur district on Friday night to go to Saidpur in Nilphamari. But he remained stranded at Lalon Shah Bridge as of Tuesday due to continuous blockade.

"Usually it takes around 20 hours to go to Saidpur. But I am on the halfway after five days. In Faridpur district I got stuck for two days and I am staying here at Lalon Shah Bridge since Sunday night," Mamun said.

He dare not cross Pakshey and Rooppur areas of the highway in Ishwardi upazila as blockaders vandalize vehicles and loot money and valuables even at night, if the truckers do not pay toll to them.

Blockaders looted and vandalised over 100 loaded trucks in different points from Lalon Shah bridge to

Vandalism, arson, extortion continue

Dashuria area in last couple of days, truckers said during this correspondent's visit to the bridge area on Tuesday.

A loaded truck has to cross the blockade spots of the highway after giving Tk 1500 to 2500 to the blockaders, they said.

"I started for Khulna with a truck loaded with cucumber from Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj district on Monday noon. I reached Lalon Shah

Bridge at about 11:00am today after giving Tk 1800 to the blockaders at Rooppur fuel station point of the highway," said Md Alamgir Hossain, a vegetable trader of Khulna.

"If I cannot reach the destination by night today, major portion of the goods will be damaged," he said.

Officer in Charge of Ishwardi police station Biman Kumar said

additional policemen have been deployed at different points to save the truckers on the important highway.

"When a few trucks gather at a point of the highway, police escort them to Lalon Shah Bridge. If anybody goes without the notice of police, we cannot take their responsibility," he said.

Local BNP leaders

claimed that their activists blockade the highway as part of the party's countrywide continuous programme.

"Blockaders do not extort the truckers. A gang of criminals loot the trucks on the highway but the blame goes to BNP-Jamaat men," Md Johirul Islam, office secretary of Pabna district unit of BNP.



Loaded trucks lie stranded near Pakshey Lalon Shah Bridge in Ishwardi upazila under Pabna district as the drivers dare not cross the area amid rampant arson, vandalism and extortion by supporters of countrywide blockade sponsored by BNP-led 18-party alliance.

3 kidnapped schoolboys rescued

UNB, Khulna

Police early yesterday rescued three schoolboys, who were kidnapped by forest robbers from a village adjacent to the Sundarbans in Koyra upazila on Monday night.

The rescued boys are Abu Saleh, 9, son of Azizul Gazi, Abul Hasan, 10, son of Nur Bakhs, and Muzahid, 12, son of Golam Mostafa Dhali of Koyra village.

Locals said a gang of robbers picked up the three schoolchildren at gunpoint while they were returning from tuition at about 9 pm on Monday, and fled into the deep forest.

Later, they demanded Tk 5 lakh ransom to free the boys. They also gave a telephone number asking the guardians of the schoolboys to send the money through bKash.

A team of Koyra police conducted a drive in the Sundarbans in the early hours yesterday tracking the mobile phone number and rescued them, said officer in-charge of the police station Subir Dutta.

Ex-AL front body leader murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

An expelled Swetchhasebok League leader was killed by criminals at Siddique Master Road of the town yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Arman Islam, alias Sundari Arman, 30, son of former commissioner of Mymensingh municipality Md Shafiqul Islam of Golapjan Road in the town.

Police said, when Arman was crossing the Siddique Master Road around 3:30pm, a gang waylaid him and hit him severely with bricks in his head, killing him on the spot.

The gang also stabbed Arman in his hand, chest and back with sharp weapons, police said. Arman was accused in three criminal cases filed with Kotwali police station, they added.

Kalashkathi temples falling apart for want of attention

SUSHANTO GHOSH, Barisal

Five nearly 400-year-old temples -- one with rare terracotta plaques -- at Kalashkathi in Barisal are on the verge of destruction, thanks to the authorities' indifference to historical sites.

Goutam Mukharjee, one of the descendants of Kalashkathi zamindar (landlord), said zamindar Janaki Ballav established the estate more than 350 years ago by taking lease of land from the Nawabs of Bengal.

There were 13 landlord families at Kalashkathi of Bakerganj who constructed palaces, temples, and monuments in memories of the zamindars, locals said.

Presently there are, however, only five temples and three palaces remaining in dilapidated conditions. The lands on which the structures are established are now belong to private owners.

Locals and archaeologists say the historical evidence could gradually wear away as people are using the places in whatsoever ways.

A group of archaeologists and historians, while visiting the site recently, were astonished to see the rare terracotta structures and demanded immediate measures to protect the temples and mementos.

Jahangirnagar University's archaeology professor Swadhin Sen, said, these temples could be that of 16th and 17th centuries.

"The terracotta plaques profusely used in a Deul type temple are rare in Bengal, especially in the southern region," Sen told this correspondent.

The brick-built structure has two arched entrances -- one on the north and the other on the western sides. The spandrel of the arch entrances is decorated with two stylised lions that are common decoration motifs of many late medieval temples of Bengal, he said.

Both sides of the arch entrances are decorated with separate panels of terracotta plaques while three rows of

terracotta panels lay above the arch, displaying 24 terracotta plaques.

One of the panels above the spandrel includes several plaques of the Dasavatara of Brahmanical God Visnu and false corner pillars.

A dedicatory inscription is installed above the main entrance, said Professor Swadhin Sen, adding that the content of the plaques needs analysis to understand its meanings.

This Deul temple located near one UK expatriate AB Talukder's house is bravely

battling against ruin. However, the land around the edifice is under cultivation.

"So, if the temple is not protected, we shall lose some structures of immense historical values", professor Sen said, adding that he has already written to the Department of Archaeology suggesting immediate steps.

There are also Durga Mandir, Shiv Mandir and Kali Mandir. Parts of these temples have worn out with locals using them as cattle shed and club office.

Chandranath Mukharjee,

president of Kalashkathi Kali Bari Sarbojanin Puja Mandir, said both social and government initiatives are imperative to preserve the sites from destruction.

However, Mirza Muzahidul Islam, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Bakerganj, said he came to know about the existence of such temples in the area first from this correspondent.

"If local people are interested, we will definitely contact the archaeology department to preserve those", he said.



HISTORIC TEMPLES UNCARED FOR: Five temples, built around 400 years ago at Kalashkathi in Bakerganj upazila under Barisal district, are heading towards gradual destruction as the authorities concerned are showing utter reluctance about their preservation. The photo shows two of the quaint structures, now bereft of their beauty.