

BCL men go on the rampage

Cop among 10 hurt, BNP office, several houses vandalised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chuadanga

At least 10 people, including a policeman, were injured and local BNP office was set afire during a turf war between two factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League in Chuadanga on Thursday.

During the clash, Chhatra League cadres vandalised two shops, one motorcycle, a truck, an auto-rickshaw and six houses. They also torched a police van.

Locals and police said the groups -- one led by Chuadanga unit President Sharif Hossain and another by General Secretary Joarder Anik -- clashed for two hours sending a wave of panic through the area.

Anik and his supporters were returning after receiving Abdul Momin, an accused in a criminal case, from the district jail in a motorcycle procession.

As they reached Impact Hospital around 6:30pm, the rival group allegedly hurled two cocktails at the procession, injuring Anik and his associate Rimon.

Both sides got locked in a pitched battle that also spread to several other parts of the town.

Later, police and Rab stepped in to bring the situation under control.

The victims alleged that the BCL men while vandalising the shops and houses looted cash and valuables.

The BCL leaders denied the allegation. The feuding groups blamed each other for the violence.

The houses that came under attack also include the residences of BNP leaders Khondokar Abdur Jabbar and Lt Col (retd) Sayed Kamruzzaman and Awami League leader Shafiqur Rahman Shafi.

Shafi's wife Shahida Khatun, 48, was hurt in the incident.

Constable Shahidul, Khalid, 18, Malek, 26, Raju, 25, and truck driver Alamgir, 25, and his helper Manik, 18, were also among the injured.

Of them, the driver and the helper were admitted to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital while others were given first aid, hospital sources said.

Meanwhile, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir condemned the attack on their party office by the Chhatra League men and demanded arrest of persons responsible.

Chuadanga Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ershadul Kabir Chowdhury said additional policemen were deployed in the town.

Embattled Turkey PM to freeze judicial reforms

AFP, Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday offered to freeze key parts of a controversial justice reform bill in an apparent climbdown in the face of widespread opposition.

The compromise was welcomed by the main opposition party, which had warned the legislation would threaten the independence of the judiciary.

The row has added to the deep political turmoil in Turkey, which has spread to financial markets with the lira again hitting all-time lows on Friday.

Erdogan said ahead of an expected late-night vote in parliament that the legislation relating to the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) would be suspended.

While other articles of the bill would be voted on, Erdogan said he had now agreed to "freeze the part on the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors so that we can make progress because the elections are nearing".

However, the ultimate fate of the bill was not immediately clear as Erdogan also said it was "out of the question" that the reforms would be withdrawn completely.

The legislation aims to invest more powers in the justice minister and give the government a greater say over the appointment of judges and

prosecutors.

The European Union, which Turkey has long sought to join, along with rights groups and the opposition had warned that the measures could threaten the independence of state institutions and undermine democracy.

The leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, welcomed Erdogan's statement as a "very right decision" and a "democratic gain" for Turkey.

The move came a day after lawmakers again came to blows during a parliamentary debate on the bill.

The government has moved to curb the judiciary in the wake of a massive corruption scandal that has ensnared several key business and political allies of Erdogan.

It accuses supporters of influential Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen in the police and judiciary of acting as a "parallel state" and instigating the graft probe to try to topple the government ahead of key elections this year.

The embattled Erdogan has retaliated by sacking hundreds of police and prosecutors running the investigation and vowed to rid the state from what he described as a "tumor" and a "virus", referring to the so-called Gulenists.

The political crisis has severely dented Turkey's image as a model of democracy and stability in a volatile neighbourhood and raised concerns

N Korea pushes South on military drills

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday urged a sceptical South Korea to respond to a recent series of trust-building gestures and again called on Seoul to cancel upcoming military drills with the United States.

The latest apparent olive branch came in the form of an "open letter" sent to the South Korean authorities by the North's top military body on the direct orders of leader Kim Jong-Un in an effort to promote "reconciliation and unity".

Carried by the North's official KCNA news agency, the letter followed up on a series of confidence-building proposals that South Korea has already dismissed as a "deceptive" propaganda exercise.

"What is important for paving a wide avenue for mending North-South relations is to make a bold decision to stop all hostile military acts, the biggest hurdle stoking distrust and confrontation," the letter from the National Defence Commission (NDC) said.

Later in the day the North made a fresh proposal for the resumption of reunions for families separated since the Korean War, saying

the programme could provide fresh momentum to improving cross-border ties.

The North suggested that the South could choose a date for a family reunion event "at its convenience" after the time of the Lunar New Year on January 31.

The South immediately welcomed the new offer saying it would send its own proposal later for the date and other details on family reunions.

But Seoul has reacted more cautiously to the other reconciliatory steps offered by Pyongyang.

A week earlier, the NDC had sent several proposals, urging South Korea to cancel the joint exercises with the United States and offering a mutual moratorium on mudslinging by the two rivals.

Seoul not only dismissed the overtures, but warned that Pyongyang may well be laying the ground for a military confrontation.

"Regretfully, the South Korean authorities still remain unchanged in their improper attitude and negative stand," the NDC letter said.

The South "should not thoughtlessly doubt, misinterpret and rashly reject our sincere,

BLASPHEMY LAW

Pakistan court sentences Briton to death

AFP, Islamabad

A court in Pakistan has sentenced a British man to death for blasphemy for claiming to be a prophet of Islam, a prosecutor and police said yesterday.

Mohammad Asghar, a British national of Pakistani origin, was arrested in 2010 in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, near Islamabad, for writing letters claiming to be a prophet, police said.

The special court inside Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, where Asghar is being held, rejected defence claims that the 65-year-old has mental health problems.

Pakistan's tough blasphemy laws have attracted criticism from rights groups, who say they are frequently abused to settle personal scores.

"Asghar claimed to be a prophet even inside the court. He confessed it in front of the judge," Javed Gul, a government prosecutor, told AFP.

"Asghar used to write it even on his visiting card."

Blasphemy is an extremely sensitive issue in Pakistan, where 97 percent of the population is Muslim, and insulting the Prophet Mohammed can carry the death penalty.

But the country has had a de facto moratorium on civilian hangings since 2008. Only one person has been executed since then, a



Traffic towards the Biswa Ijtema ground stand still in Uttara yesterday afternoon as thousands of devotees thronged the bank of the Turag to offer Juma prayers on the inaugural day of the second largest congregation of the Muslims.

PHOTO: STAR

Feroz made chief

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notification by the parliament secretariat. They are Atiur Rahman Atik of Sherpur-1, Shahiduzzaman Sarkar of Naogaon-2, Iqbalur Rahim of Dinajpur-3, Md Shahabuddin of Moulvibazar-1 and Solaiman Haque Joardar of Chuadanga-1.

Also MPs in the previous parliament, the five newly appointed whips got the responsibility for the first time.

There had been complaints that Shahid and his brothers grabbed the key posts of the district and Kamalganj upazila Awami League and its associated bodies, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The former chief whip had renamed several institutions after his name and managed tenders of many development projects in the district for his family members.

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not reach Abdus Shahid over the phone for his comment as his mobile phone was switched off.

However, two legislators from Moulvibazar, Syed Mohsin Ali (Maulvibazar-3) and Shahabuddin (Maulvibazar-1), have been made the social welfare minister and whip of the 10th parliament.

President Abdul Hamid has convened the first session of the new parliament on January 29.

Amid a boycott by the BNP-led 18-party alliance, the AL won two-thirds majority in parliament in the January 5 national election.

The lawmakers were sworn in on January 9 and the 49-member cabinet was formed on January 12, with Sheikh Hasina as the prime minister.

Democracy at stake

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issued to mark what they call "The day [January 25] of democracy's death".

Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League or BAKSAL, propagated by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was a political amalgamation of all the political parties in the country. Passed through the fourth amendment to the constitution on January 25, 1975, it banned all the existing political parties, including the Awami League.

BAKSAL was later dissolved after the assassination of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975.

Referring to Awami League's role in establishing BAKSAL in 1975, Khaleida Zia alleged that the party killed democracy and established an autocratic administration by depriving people of their fundamental rights.

"Apprehending the danger [of losing] of a free and fair election, the party scrapped the system of neutral caretaker government from the constitution and it has once again deprived the people of their voting rights. It is not even hesitating to put the country's unity, solidarity and sovereignty at stake to make its autocratic rule longer through holding a farcical election," the BNP chief.

She also claimed that the people of the country are committed to ousting "the neo-BAKSAL government" to reinstate democracy in the

Cops seek fresh

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BNP leader arrested in the case.

On March 2 last year, the case was filed with Ramna Police Station against 28 BNP leaders, including its acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, on charges of vandalising vehicles, blasting cocktails and preventing police from discharging their duties at Shantinagar and Malibagh areas in the capital during a demonstration the same day.

The police on Wednesday night moved to show Mahub arrested in the case, advocate M Masud Rana, a lawyer for Mahub, told The Daily Star.

Yesterday, the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka fixed January 28 for a hearing on the seven-day remand application, and also asked the IO to produce Mahub before it on that day.

On Thursday, the HC granted the BNP leader bail in an attempted murder case. The court on Tuesday also declared illegal a trial court order that placed Mahub on a two-day remand in that case.

On January 7, detectives picked up Mahub when he came out of the Jatiya Press Club premises after a programme where he criticised the January 5 election boycotted by the BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Thirty feared dead in Canada old home fire

AFP, L'isle-verte

Canadian firefighters searched the ashes of a Quebec retirement home Thursday after it burned nearly to the ground on a bleak mid-winter night, leaving more than 30 residents feared dead.

Quebec police confirmed five fatalities from the blaze, while three dozen more remained unaccounted for as rescuers prepared to search through the night for more victims.

The search and an investigation into the cause of the fire were hampered by up to 30 centimeters (a foot) of ice covering the wreckage after water used to douse the fire froze.

The blaze at the 52-unit home, which housed

around 50 to 60 elderly people, half of them more than 85 years old, broke out shortly after midnight.

"We could hear screaming from inside. The fire was intense, it was like a haystack on fire," witness and neighbor Pascal Fillion told French-language public broadcaster Radio-Canada.

By 1:00 am, the building "was completely engulfed in flames, which were fanned by the wind," he said.

The home is in L'Isle-Verte, a small town 450 kilometers (280 miles) northeast of Montreal with a population of around 1,400 people.

The town's acting Mayor Ginette Caron told a news conference that most residents of the home are reliant on caregivers.

School children forced to join

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and crests.

Apart from that, the local units of AL and its associate bodies erected at least 50 gates on roads of Charghat and Bagha upazilas to greet the state minister.

According to the students, they were called to school at 11:00am yesterday although it was the weekend. Around 2:00pm their teachers lined them up from the school gate to the function stage and kept them there until 4:30pm.

The students were not given any food or anything to compensate when they were allowed to go home around 5:00pm, said students and witnesses.

Abu Saleh Musa, a student of class-X of Bagha High School, said he only had some biscuits between breakfast and until he had returned home.

"We followed the teachers' instructions. It is fun standing together with friends to greet the

minister," he said.

Some school teachers said they took the students there to gain the minister's favour for the development of their schools.

Nishipada Sarker, headmaster of Rahmatullah Girls' High School, told The Daily Star that they had not arranged food for the students as they were asked to bring their own food.

"The reception was actually to benefit the schools. He [the minister] had done a lot in the past and we expect his support in the future," he said.

Meanwhile, State Minister Shahriar in his speech at the function apologised to the students for lining them up. He requested all not to do so again, including giving him gold items in present.

He declared to donate money worth the gold items given to him to a local organisation for the physically and mentally challenged. He also urged journalists not to present the news

57 fortune seekers held

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Bangladeshis to work in Malaysia with the wrong visas.

Malaysian media in recent times have reported cases in which Bangladeshis were detained at Kuala Lumpur International Airport for having fake labour visas.

Around 300 illegal Bangladeshis had been arrested since Tuesday when the Malaysian government began its crackdown on illegal workers.

According to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, around 25,000 Bangladeshis are currently staying in

Malaysia without any documents.

Expatriates' Welfare Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said, "We cannot do any thing for the illegal workers, who did not take the opportunity of amnesty offered before this crackdown.

"Since 2011, the Malaysian government had been asking illegal foreigners to register and become legal, but some of our people did not respond," he told the reporters on Tuesday.

Malaysia had stopped hiring workers from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2012, allegedly for anomalies in recruitment.

DCC polls not in sight

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way for the polls, but the Local Government Division of the LGRD ministry issued a gazette notification expanding the boundary of Dhaka South City Corporation.

The EC then asked the Local Government Division to revise the demarcation. But the division took to dragging their feet over the matter, forcing the EC to ditch its plans for the polls and go ahead with national election instead.

Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz on Wednesday told The Daily Star, "How can we hold the election if the LGRD ministry does not create necessary grounds and complete boundary demarcation?"

However, sources point to different reasons for the government's foot-dragging despite the Awami League Central Working Committee deciding on Saturday that all local body elections would be held gradually.

Sources at the EC and Local Government Division told The Daily Star that the government had not given them the go-ahead for the polls for some explained reason.

Local government experts think the elections are not being held for political reasons.

BNP says the Awami League does not want the polls to be held, as it fears a humiliating defeat for the mayoral candidate it would back.

Refuting it, Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif claimed the party had a number of potential candidates who could become mayor.

Requesting anonymity, a former top official of the LGD told The Daily Star that a few ruling party leaders actually do not want the elections at all.

The official claimed the influential leaders lobby for halting the polls as the status quo helps their businesses and benefits them financially.

Local government expert Tofael Ahmed said the problems facing the capital city are massive, and only elections to the city corporations are never going to solve those. It would take a lot more than polls to bring the city back to a decent shape.

"The government must think about this seriously as Dhaka has already become a failed city and the least liveable one in the world," he said.

The governance in Bangladesh would not be good unless good city governance is ensured, he said.

xHe claimed that even if elections were held, problems like traffic jams would remain. Coordination between the 52 service providers in the city must be ensured, he added.