

SIEGE OF KHALEDA'S OFFICE

# Studies hampered at Gulshan school

PRABIR BARUA CHOWDHURY

Law enforcers' continued siege of BNP Chairperson's Gulshan office is adversely affecting educational activities of around 2,000 students of a school in the neighbourhood.

Students of Gulshan Model School and College, which stands opposite Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office on road no. 86, on Monday were not allowed to move past barricades put up by law enforcers in front of the BNP Chairperson's office.

Those who attempted to attend classes on the following days were met with the same fate. This incident has caused panic among the students and their parents.

"It's a panicky situation prevailing here for the last few days. A huge number of police are standing guard there as if a battle will soon begin. How would I send my child to school amid this situation?" said a mother preferring anonymity who came to pay her son's school admission fees yesterday.

Her son, who has been promoted to class-VII, said: "Seeing so many policemen around the school we feel

scared to attend classes."

Established in 1972, the non-government institution that enjoys the government's monthly pay order facilities has 1,500 students at school level and 500 at college level.

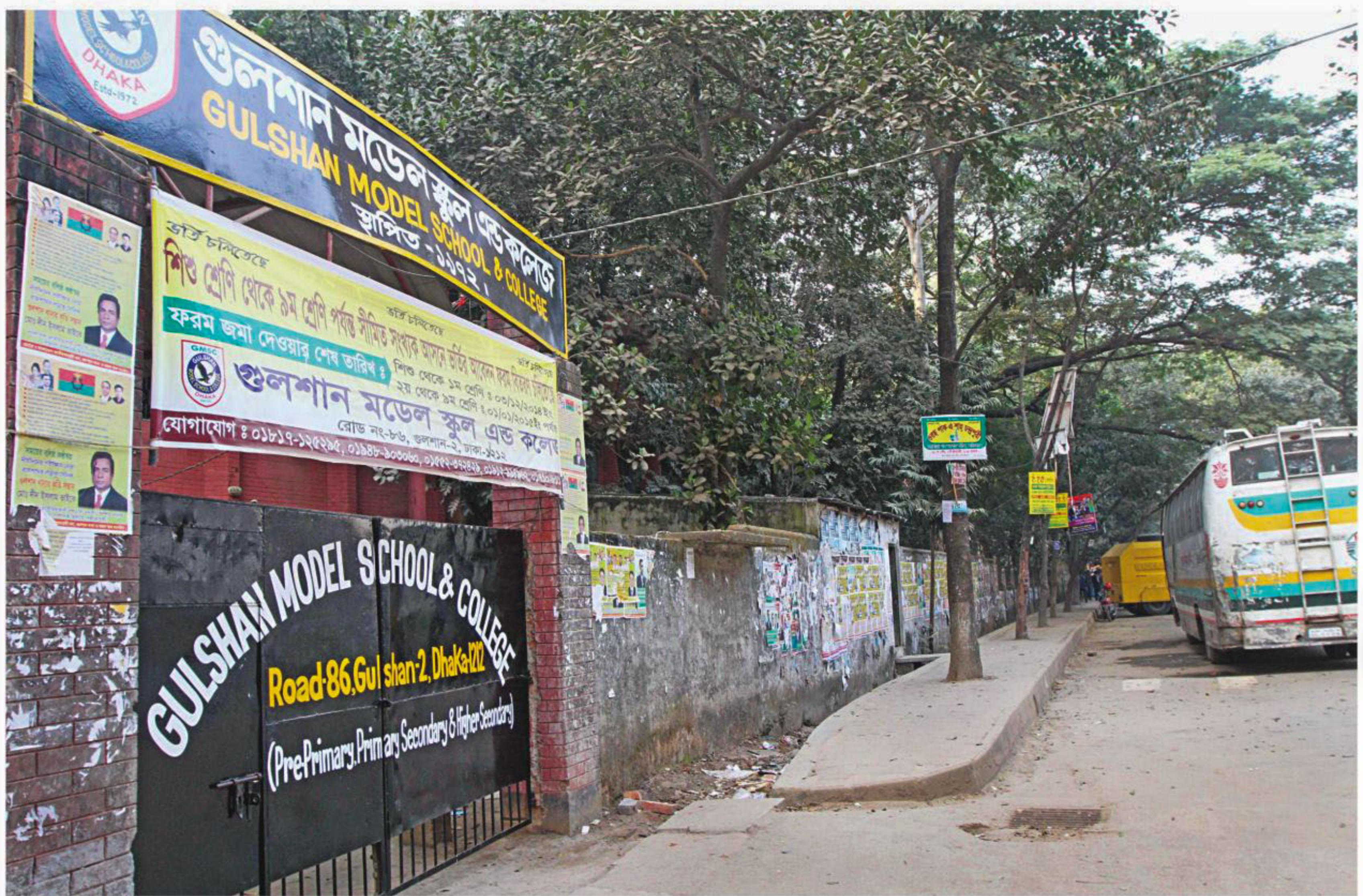
During a visit to the school yesterday, all classrooms were found empty. Only a handful of students came by for admission, but they had to show their admission papers before being allowed on the school road.

A model test of class-X was held but only 45 out of 176 students took the test, said teachers.

Ali Ashraf, principal of the institution, said they communicated with police officials and requested them to ensure students' entry to the school but no action was taken as yet.

"If this situation continues, students' studies will be irreparably hampered," he said.

However, Firoz Kabir, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Thana (Investigation), denied the allegations. He said whoever identified himself as a student or a teacher of the school was allowed to pass.



The gate of Gulshan Model School and College, which is just yards away from the BNP chairperson's office, is closed even though the school remains open. Pupils have not been allowed to move past the barricades put up by police in front of the BNP chief's office. This is badly affecting their studies. PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

# Govt appoints new envoys to Greece, Lebanon, Turkey

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to appoint new ambassadors to Greece, Lebanon and Turkey.

Md Jashim Uddin, director general of East Asia and Pacific Wing, is to be appointed as the envoy to Greece; Abdul Motaleb Sarker, director general, Saarc & Bimstec, to Lebanon; and Md Allama Siddiki, director general, administration & ICT wing, to Turkey, said Ministry of Foreign Affairs sources.

The posts in Greece and Lebanon felt vacant after the withdrawal of the envoys from the missions.

In July last year, the government called back its Ambassador to Lebanon AFM Gousal Azam Sarker over "mismanagement" in running the embassy.

Later in September, Ambassador to Greece Golam Mohammad was sent

back as he was found guilty of sexually harassing a female official of the International Organisation for Migration in Athens.

Allama Siddiki will replace Ambassador Md Zulfiqur Rahman who has been transferred from Turkey's Ankara to Seoul, South Korea.

Meanwhile, the government has also decided to appoint Md Nazrul Islam, currently serving as charge d'affairs in Beirut, Lebanon, as the deputy chief of the mission in Riyadh.

Director General of External Publicity Wing Noor-E Helal Saifur Rahman has been appointed as Deputy High Commissioner in Karachi.

The foreign minister sources also said the government already sent the documents relating to the appointments of the ambassadors to the respective countries.

# 2 robbers killed in 'gunfight' with Rab men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Two members of a Sundarbans robber gang were killed in a so-called gunfight with Rab in the forest yesterday morning.

One of the dead was identified as Sagir, 30, second-in-command of infamous "Daroga Bahini", according to the elite force. However, the identity of other could not be known immediately.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rapid Action Battalion team raided Shimanar Khal in Chandpai range when the gang was planning to commit a robbery around 6:30am, said Maj Adnan Kabir, deputy commander of Rab-8, who led the drive.

Sensing their presence, the criminals opened fire. The Rab men shot back to retaliate, triggering the "gun battle" that killed the two robbers, he said.

The other robbers fled.

The Rab official claimed that they recovered 12 firearms and some 177 bullets from the spot.

The bodies were sent to Bagerhat Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies.

# Fog over BJP chief's call to Khaleda

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But private television channel Ekattor TV, quoting a highly placed diplomatic source, yesterday reported that no such telephone conversation took place between Amit and Khaleda.

The TV report further said a phone call was made to the BJP leader from Khaleda Zia's office, but no conversation could be held due to problems in the telephone line.

A diplomatic source also told The Daily Star that the TV news report was correct. But the source declined to be quoted.

Later in the day, the ruling Awami League at an emergency press briefing at

the party chief's Dhanmondi office said the story of the phone call was made up by the BNP.

"We have information that the BJP chief did not call Khaleda Zia or talk to her," said AL Joint General Secretary Mahbulul Alam Hanif.

"The BNP's claim that the BJP chief telephoned Khaleda Zia and inquired about her health is nothing but false."

Rather, attempts were made from the BNP side two times to call Amit Shah, but Khaleda could not talk to him, the AL spokesperson said, adding he had talked to the Indian high commission in Dhaka and became sure of it.

Following the Ekattor TV report and

the AL's allegation, Maruf issued a fresh press statement yesterday saying the media report that Amit Shah talked to Khaleda over telephone was "absolutely true".

"We would like to firmly inform all concerned that the information given to the news media is absolutely true."

He added the "move to create confusion" by quoting unknown diplomatic or other sources is very unfortunate.

"Conversation between chiefs of two important political parties of two neighbouring countries is usual practice," Maruf said.

However, versions of Amit or his party over the debate could not be known yet.

# US trashes media reports

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nor the Congress members issued any such statement on Bangladesh politics, the House body said on Thursday, referring to reports run by a section of newspapers in Bangladesh and the UK edition of International Business Times.

In a statement on Thursday, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Ed Royce, and Committee's Ranking Member Eliot Engel said the

press report on the political situation in Bangladesh is based on false statement by US Congressmen.

"Certain press reports in Bangladeshi media outlets dated January 7 regarding the political situation in Bangladesh are based upon a fraudulent statement attributed to the US House Foreign Affairs Committee and certain Members of Congress, including Committee Chairman Ed Royce, Ranking Member Eliot Engel, Steve

Chabot, Joseph Crowley, George Holding and Grace Meng," it read.

"Though the committee and many members of Congress continue to monitor the political situation in Bangladesh, the Committee did not -- and the Members did not -- issue any such statement."

It is unacceptable that any party would seek to use a fraudulent press statement from the US Congress to advance their political goals, it added.

# Jubo League man killed

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JUBO LEAGUE LEADER KILLED

The president of Anderchar union unit Jubo League, youth front of the ruling Awami League, of Noakhali Sadar upazila was beaten to death allegedly by political opponents in Laxmipur.

Mohammad Yusuf, 35, with his two brothers was returning home on a motorbike from Char Basubazar of Laxmipur's Kamalanagar upazila around 11:00pm on Thursday. Some unidentified miscreants, equipped with iron rods, waylaid them and beat Yusuf dead on the spot, Officer-in-Charge Kabir Ahmed of Kamalanagar Police Station said, quoting the injured brothers.

In retaliation, local AL men torched two motorbikes and vandalised five shops in the area, reports our Noakhali correspondent.

MAGISTRATE ATTACKED

In Feni, executive magistrate Abdul Quader, 35, was injured when blockaders hurled a crude bomb on his microbus on Shaheed Shahidullah Kaisar Road around 8:30pm when he

patrolling streets to contain picketing, said Officer-in-Charge Mahub Morshed of Feni Sadar Police Station.

Splinters penetrated the corneas of Quader's both eyes, said Dr Anwar Hossain of Feni Sadar Upazila Health Complex.

In other incidents, a truck and five battery-powered auto-rickshaws were set ablaze, and two covered vans and two minibuses vandalised in the district.

AND MORE VIOLENCE...

In Dhaka city, three people received burns after pickets set fire to their vehicles in two incidents.

Blockaders, impersonating passengers, poured petrol on a bus before setting it on fire at Mohammadpur around 11:00pm, leaving Khadem, 32, and Moazzem, 30, burnt.

At Moghbazar, driver Abul Kalam, 26, was burned after blockade supporters hurled a petrol bomb on his car around 11:00pm.

All three burn victims were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, with Kalam reportedly in a critical condition.

Meanwhile, general secretary of BNP's Ward 3 unit Giasuddin received shotgun pellets in his thighs as police opened fire on blockaders in Kadamtoli area last night, said police.

At the DMCH, Giasuddin alleged the law enforcers had picked him up from his Shyampur Road house and shot him in the legs from a close range.

In Narayanganj, at least five BNP men were injured in a clash with police, a bus was torched at Fatullah and at least eight vehicles were vandalised at Nitaiganj by blockaders, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

Police detained two BNP men and filed two cases against around 40 people, including district BNP President Taimur Alam Khandaker.

At least 20 blockaders were injured in a clash with police at Hukum Ali Bus Stand in Dhunat of Bogra, a BNP stronghold, around noon. Police detained around 50 people from there.

In Gazipur, alleged blockade supporters dismantled fishplates of the rail track at Vanua near Joydebpur Railway

Junction. Two trains narrowly escaped accident due to timely sighting and speedy repair of the damage, reports our Gazipur correspondent.

Twelve Jamaat-Shibir men were held from a house at Gazipur's Noljani and five homemade bombs were recovered from them.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reports that blockaders hurled a petrol bomb to set a coal-laden truck on fire at Shimultoli village of Panchbibi upazila in Joypurhat on Thursday night. Later, firefighters with the help of locals doused it.

At least five blockaders were injured as they clashed with police at Ramchandrapur of Hajiganj in Chandpur yesterday evening, according to our correspondent there.

Meanwhile in Chapainawabganj, 277 people were accused in separate cases for attacking police, torching vehicles and other subversive activities, our correspondent reports.

SPECIAL SECURITY FORTRANSPORT

Escorted by law enforcers, both passen-

ger and cargo vehicles have started operating between the major cities on a limited scale.

Law enforcers escorted over 2,700 trucks and buses to different destinations across the country, Border Guard Bangladesh claimed in a press release.

Under special security arrangements, the first convoy of around 150 vehicles left Chittagong port around 10:00pm on Thursday, said Hazi Munir Ahmed, president of Inter-district Goods Carrying Transport Owners and Labourers Forum.

All the vehicles reached their destinations safe, he told our Chittagong correspondent.

Some 20 buses left Rajshahi for the capital on Thursday night with police cars escorting them all the way.

Encouraging transport owners to operate on a broader scale, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan at a programme in the capital yesterday said that the government would compensate them if blockaders caused any casualty or damage.

# Devotees defy

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sermons delivered by Islamic scholars. Around 5,000 Muslims from 50 countries have joined the congregation so far.

A huge number of people took inter-district trains to come to the venue, while many arrived on buses, pickup vans or rented minibuses ignoring blockade violence.

"We, a group of 11 people, arrived here Thursday night. We had to endure huge sufferings due to shortage of public transport," said Manik Miyan, adding that they had started from Habiganj at 11:00am and reached the Ijtema ground around 9:00pm.

"I have been attending the Ijtema for 10 years but never endured such sufferings like this," said Abdul Ali, 55, of the group.

Superintendent of Police in Gazipur Harun-ur-Rashid said the atmosphere in and around the venue removed the memories of blockade from the devotees' minds. "Here it seems there is no blockade," he observed.

Around 12,000 policemen were deployed in a five-layered security net in and around the Ijtema ground, SM Mahfuzul Haque Nuruzzaman, deputy inspector general of police, said.

Three people heading to the Ijtema were killed and another was critically injured as a bus and a private car collided head-on on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway in Dhamrai on the outskirts of the capital yesterday.

FREE MEDICAL CAMPS

A few thousand people received treatment from free medical services offered by different government and private organisations near the Ijtema ground.

Besides, around 1,000 devotees took treatment at Tongi Hospital and three medical camps under the supervision of the civil surgeon of Gazipur from 8:00am Thursday to 6:00am yesterday.

NAMAZ-E-JANAZA

The namaz-e-janaza of two people who had died in the areas close to the Ijtema ground was held after the Juma prayers.

DOWRY FREE MARRIAGE

Like the previous years, dowry-free weddings were arranged at the Ijtema ground today, the second day of the congregation. Organisers said registration was going on to that end.

# Businesses bleed in blockade

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said Abul Kalam, vice-president of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity.

Transport sector makes up 7.31 percent of the country's GDP. When this sector bleeds, it affects many other sectors of the \$150 billion economy.

As an immediate impact of the blockade, prices of farm produce have fallen at farm levels. In response, many farmers have stopped harvesting their produce, causing a demand-supply gap. In the domino effect, prices in city markets have soared.

Supply and distribution of industrial and essential consumer goods are also facing disruptions. Fearing attacks, trucks and vans have been keeping from the streets. The few that ply charge high fares, in some cases double the usual amount.

Fear of violence is taking a toll also on domestic tourism at a time when it is otherwise at its peak.

unrest prolongs, its effects on the economy will be like last year's. While it will hit people of all groups, those from middle and low income brackets will be the hardest hit.

The economy is yet to recover from the loss of last year's 53 hartals and 19 blockades, as the investment climate is yet to be restored.

Nationwide shutdowns and blockades in six months prior to the January 5 election last year cost the transport, garment, agriculture and tourism sectors Tk 49,017 crore, according to the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The think-tank estimates that a day's shutdown shaves around 0.9 percent off the gross domestic product a year at market price.

Zahid Hussain, lead economist of the World Bank, Bangladesh, said the losses incurred from the blockade could be made up only if normally returned quickly. But the income loss of the lower income people will become

permanent if the unrest lingers.

Atiqul Islam, president of the BGMEA, said the re-emergence of political turmoil did not bode well for the economy. "Factories need raw materials from home and abroad, but supply is being cut off because of the nonstop blockade. Our shipments too are affected."

GROWERS AT A LOSS

Four days of blockade so far this year, and farmers are already counting heavy losses. Prices of some vegetables at the farm level have fallen to an extent that they do not fetch the production cost.

"The situation is similar to last year's political chaos. We incurred huge losses then and we are going to incur losses again," Zinnath Ali Kosba, a farmer in Dinajpur, told The Daily Star.

Jitendranath Roy, another farmer in the district, said he could sell only half his produce as there was no buyer in the wholesale market on January 6, the first day of the blockade. Later, he sold off his crops at a throwaway price.

In Bogra's Mahasthan Bazar, a vegetable wholesale depot in the north, cauliflowers were selling at Tk 1 per kg, down from Tk 5 before the blockade. Prices of cabbage, potato and aubergine have also slumped sharply, said Rahidul Islam, a wholesaler there.

He added some trucks were taking risks to hit the streets, but were charging double, a fact Rustom Ali Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Truck and Covered Van Owners Association, admitted.

TOURISM SECTOR

Flows of tourists to the beach town of Cox's Bazar, country's most popular tourist destination, have dipped.

On January 2, the city hosted some 1 lakh tourists. On Wednesday, there were only about 1,000 tourists, said Abul Kashem Sikder, general secretary of Hotel, Motel and Guest House Association in Cox's Bazar.

"Those who had come earlier somehow managed to return to where they