



The derailed carriages of Joyantika Express at Paghachong in Brahmanbaria yesterday. Alleged supporters of the nationwide hartal had removed the rail lines.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

## JOINT FORCES DRIVE Villagers allege ransacking of their houses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Members of joint forces allegedly ransacked and vandalised four houses at Chak Bohorom village of Sadar upazila in Chapainawabganj during a drive yesterday.

Most people of the village are said to be supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami.

This correspondent visited the village yesterday and saw broken television, furniture and laptops and ceramic chips strewn over the floors of the houses.

Members of police, Rab and BGB stormed the house of Shafiqul Islam, a Jamaat supporter and a member of ward No 6 of Ranihati union parishad, around 12:30pm and destroyed furniture, two laptops, one fan, and ceramic items in the house, said Shafiqul's daughters.

Joint forces also ransacked the houses of Habibur Rahman, ameer of Ranihati union unit of Jamaat-e-Islami, his brother Abdur Rakib and

Kawsar Ali, librarian of the Chapainawabganj Government College, locals said.

All the male members were outside their houses during the drive, they added.

Refuting the allegation, police said the raids were carried out to arrest criminals and recover arms and explosive materials intended to be used in subversive activities during the ongoing nationwide blockade enforced by the BNP-led alliance.

Bashir Ahmed, superintendent of police in Chapainawabganj, said joint forces raided different areas in the district yesterday to arrest criminals and recover arms and explosive materials.

Asked if he knew about vandalism during the raids, the SP said he had no such information.

Jaasim Uddin, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station, said joint forces arrested three people from the village during the drive.

## Opening fire to protect lives not rights violation

BGB will use arms if attacked,  
its chief says again

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Rangpur

Chief of the paramilitary force Border Guard Bangladesh Maj Gen Aziz Ahmed yesterday reiterated that the BGB would retaliate with fire if attacked during the ongoing countrywide blockade.

The same comment made on January 15 had irked the BNP, which along with 19 other parties of the alliance has been enforcing an indefinite nationwide blockade since January 6. The BNP had even issued a statement deploring the comment.

"We will try our best to protect the lives and properties of the people," the director general of the BGB said yesterday while addressing a view-exchange meeting with journalists at Rangpur sector commander's office.



Maj Gen Aziz said the BGB, following the rules, shoots to protect lives and properties of the people. It is neither a violation of human rights nor is it a violation of the law, he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and other ruling party leaders had been

saying that the government would go tough on subversive activities. Social Welfare Minister Syed Mohsin Ali recently said the government was planning to issue orders for shooting arsonists and other saboteurs on sight.

At least 30 people have been killed in violence that gripped the country since January 6.

Earlier in the day, the BGB chief inaugurated officers' quarters, residence of the regional commander, Junior Commissioned Officers' (JCO) mess, SM barracks, staff quarters and office building in Rangpur.

## Unrest puts poor in a tight spot

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This correspondent stayed at the place for around three hours.

Moti Mia got work for only three days since the blockade began on January 6. Facing a financial crisis, he sent his wife to her father's house in Noakhali a week ago to borrow some money to provide for his four-member family. But she couldn't return due to the blockade.

"We don't seek any favour from them [politicians]. All we want is that they keep the situation normal. We will earn our living on our own. We have children. We have to keep them alive," said Moti.

"We want peace," said another middle-aged labourer, Kulsuma Begum.

Azizul Mia, who managed to find work only for two days in the last one week, said, "If the blockade and hartal continue, we have to leave the capital." "We don't want this sort of politics,"

said the 45-year-old labourer from Kishoreganj.

Bus driver Arif's is a different struggle. Braving the ongoing blockade, he runs his vehicle risking his life and also that of his passengers.

"I feel scared of being attacked every time I drive the bus. But I have to make a living," said Arif at Mohakhali Bus Stand.

He usually earns Tk 10,000 to 12,000 a week. But due to the blockade, his earnings have slid to Tk 2,000 to 3,000 with the number of trips falling to two to three from 12 to 14 a week.

"Everybody wants to see normalcy back in the country. But will our politicians listen to us?" said the 35-year-old man from Bhaluka in Mymensingh.

Several drivers and helpers were killed in arson attacks during the blockade, as pickets torched more than 300 vehicles and vandalised several hundred.

Street hawkers are also hit hard by the blockade and shutdowns.

Abdul Hakim, who sells garment items in front of the capital's Tejgaon College, said sales had gone down drastically.

"I usually sell items worth more than Tk 4,000 a day. It has come down to around Tk 1,500, as the number of customers has fallen due to the blockade," he said.

"Poor sales forced me to shut my business for a week during the blockade."

"We are caught in the madness of both [Sheikh] Hasina and Khaleda [Zia]," said Hakim from Shariatpur.

Rickshaw puller Abdul Hai, roadside tailor Suman Sheikh and tea vendor Salam also have similar stories to tell. Their earnings have shrunk due to the blockade, making it difficult for them to feed themselves and their families.



## New US envoy arrives in city

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador-designate to Bangladesh Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat arrived yesterday to take up her diplomatic assignment in Bangladesh.

Earlier, the US Senate confirmed the nomination of Bernicat as new US Ambassador to Bangladesh as Ambassador Dan W Mozena has gone on retirement.

Before leaving Dhaka in December last year, Mozena said, "My successor has been my friend for over 20 years. She is fabulous. Bangladesh will love her," he said.

On July 17, Bernicat said she would work hard to support efforts to promote accountability and strengthen human rights and democracy in Bangladesh.

Bernicat was the deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Human Resources at the Department of State.

## Editors for talks to end impasse

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smoothly.

Yesterday's meeting came on the heels of Thursday's meeting in which cabinet members told high-ups of electronic media to show the real situation of the country and not to sensationalise incidents of violence.

As Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu sought editors' views about the current political crisis, they referred to Thursday's meeting where senior ministers had claimed that the country's situation was normal and there was no crisis in the country other than some "sporadic incidents of violence", meeting sources said.

Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud, Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, Prime Minister's Information Adviser Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, State Minister for Labour and Manpower Mojibul Haq Chunnun, and Information Secretary Mortuza Ahmed, among others, were present at the meeting.

## 'Solution in a week'

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ruling party's rhetoric by calling a fresh 36-hour nationwide hartal beginning yesterday. This is on top of the ongoing nationwide blockade since January 6. The alliance says the shutdown is to protest the proposed hike of electricity price and arrests of their leaders.

Talking to The Daily Star, some senior BNP leaders have said there is no new scope of backing away; they would rather intensify the agitation by enforcing more hartals. They are also considering a noncooperation movement.

AL sources said the government strategy to quell the movement through administrative means prompted some ministers and party leaders to come up with the solution-in-a-week theory and also tough warnings against arsonists.

To no effect. Arsonists kept bombing public vehicles in and outside the capital, killing at least seven more people and injuring about 300 others in last week alone. The total death toll has risen to 30.

In their worst attack yet, suspected blockaders on Friday night firebombed a bus in the capital's Jatrabari, wounding at least 30 people. At least nine were said to be in a critical condition.

Contacted yesterday, a top AL leader said it was impossible to resolve the crisis by using police and other law enforcement agencies. He also admitted that the statements by ministers and AL leaders were meant to keep the party morale high and assure people of safety.

Food Minister Qamrul Islam was the first to speak about the magic solution. At a discussion on January 17, he said law enforcement agencies would take every measure to bring an

end to the movement in 10 days. Other AL leaders, including party Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif, Advisory Council Member Suranjit Sengupta and Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, followed suit. Some of them even claimed that seven days, not 10 days, were all they needed to foil the opposition programme.

Asked, Qamrul yesterday said his statement was based on an assurance of law enforcers. But he still insisted that normalcy would return in a few days.

Suranjit made a similar claim when this newspaper approached him yesterday for comments on their boastful remarks that have proved hollow.

State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal is still keeping his spirits high. He maintains law enforcers are trying their best to keep things under control.

"The prime minister has instructed us to make the situation normal at the earliest and this situation will not last long."

But opposition policymakers have a different plan, now looking to intensify the agitation as a "final offensive". They are also keeping it in mind that once they call off the ongoing movement, it will be difficult to wage a fresh one.

Their expectation of the West is also great. One BNP policymaker said they want to draw the attention of US President Barack Obama, who is visiting India, to the Bangladesh crisis. Whether Obama would like to be drawn in is another matter though.

But for BNP leaders like Moudud Ahmed and Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, if no other thing can solve this problem, talks can.

## 'Breakthrough' in US-India

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India Ltd (NPCL), following international norms will mean the government would have to pay heavy damages in case of an accident.

The U.S. is also believed to insisting on tracking fuel supplies, even from third countries, to the reactors their suppliers will be building in India. New Delhi is said to be opposing such a condition as being intrusive and would subject itself only to IAEA safeguards, reports Hindustan Times.

"Today we achieved a breakthrough understanding on two issues that were holding up our ability to advance our civil nuclear cooperation and we are committed to moving towards full implementation," said Obama at the news conference.

"This is an important step that shows how we can work together to elevate our relationship."

Though there was no official word yet on the contours, it is understood that the breakthrough was achieved in

one-on-one talks between Modi and Obama during a short stroll and over tea in the manicured lawn of Hyderabad House this afternoon.

Indian media reports said the two leaders had ironed out differences on the liability of suppliers to India in the event of a nuclear accident as the United States had dropped its demand to be able to track the whereabouts of nuclear material supplied to India.

Both leaders also held extensive discussions on enhancing cooperation in crucial areas of defence, trade and commerce and climate change.

Once they settled down at a special enclosure in the garden, Modi prepared tea for Obama as they continued their one-on-one discussion, reflecting heightened bonhomie between the two leaders.

"I share a personal chemistry with Barack. Relationships, chemistry matter more between leaders than commas and full-stops on paper," said Modi.

## Yet another sabotage on railway

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lines, leading to a schedule collapse. Besides, the pickets hurled a crude bomb at a train in Mymensingh, leaving one injured.

Alongside the hartal, yesterday was the 20th day of the combine's countrywide blockade that was marked by a few stray incidents of violence.

At least 30 people died, scores suffered burns and many were groaning in hospital beds with other forms of injuries since the beginning of the blockade.

Compared to other days, presence of public transport, including bus and

three-wheelers, was thin on the capital's thoroughfares yesterday.

In Dhaka, a bus driver was injured as alleged hartal supporters hurled at least two crude bombs at his vehicle at Karwan Bazar around 9:45am.

Driver Sarbat Ali, 35, received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, police said.

Around 9:00pm, a college student was admitted to the same hospital with head injuries after he was injured in a petrol bomb attack on a vehicle at Khilkhet.

A total of nine buses were torched across the country yesterday.

Earlier, Obama and his wife Michelle arrived in Delhi a little before 10 in the morning. Signalling his determination to take the relationship with the US to a higher level, Modi, breaking protocol, received them at the airport and greeted President Obama with a hug as the American President and the first lady came down the steps from Air Force One plane.

The two leaders also shook hands for the second meeting between them in less than five months. The first time they had met was in Washington when the Indian PM had gone there in September-October last year.

Obama has been invited by Modi to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations today. He will be the first US president to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade. He is also the first US president to visit India twice while being in office.

Soon after his arrival, Obama was given a 21-gun salute in a ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, where he greeted President Pranab

Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a 'namaste'.

"I am grateful for the extraordinary hospitality, it's a great honour to be back in India," the US president said after inspecting a Guard of Honour led by a woman officer of the Indian Air Force, Wing Commander Pujja Thakur.

He also visited Rajghat where he paid tribute to the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi and planted a sapling.

Asked about his reception in India so far, Obama said, "It's hard to match this one."

Obama's presence at today's Republic Day parade of India is the latest revival in a roller-coaster relationship between the two largest democracies that just a year ago was in tatters.

Unprecedented security was in place for Obama visit and up to 50,000 security personnel have been deployed for the visit and 15,000 new closed-circuit surveillance cameras have been installed in the capital, according to local media reports.

In Natore, a bus driver was injured when a petrol bomb was hurled at an onion-laden truck at Gazirbeel around 3:00am.

As pickets threw the bomb, driver Nazrul Islam, 35, lost control and the vehicle turned turtle beside the road. He along with onion trader Shahin Ali, 36, received first aid at Natore Sadar hospital, said Basudev Banik, district police chief.

In Naogaon, two parked buses were torched at Dhaka Bus Stand of the town around 4:30am.

In Chapainawabganj, alleged pro-blockaders torched another truck at

Chamagram of the sadar upazila and blasted several crude bombs on Saturday night.

In Chittagong, Islami Chhatra Shibir activist Sabbir Hossain Nakib, 20, from Chakaria upazila was held and beaten up when he was trying to run away after exploding a crude bomb at Aamtala around 12:45pm, said Inspector Nejam Uddin of Kotwali police.

Law enforcers arrested 49 BNP-Jamaat men in Gaibandha, 14 in Jamalpur and 11 including the district president of Shibir in Chittagong.