



Sumon Saha, a tailor, sits idle in front of Tejgaon College at Farmgate in the capital yesterday. His business has been slow since the blockade began on January 6.

PHOTO:
SK ENAMUL HAQ

ATTACK ON DINAJPUR SANTALS No action yet against culprits

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The administration was yet to take any action against those involved in the attack on a Santal majority village following a clash over disputed land that left one dead in Parbatipur on Saturday.

Fearful of security, the women and children have stopped going outside of the village surrounded by villages inhabited by Bangalees.

Monika Hasda, a villager, said, "We are struggling to look for work crossing the nearby villages even after losing all our valuables in the attack."

"We shiver in cold as the Bangalee criminals also looted our warm clothes," she alleged.

All Santal men have deserted the village after police arrested 19 Santal inhabitants, including school-going children, following the death of Sohag Islam during Saturday's clash.

Several women told this correspondent that they were passing their days fearing further attacks on them. In the previous attack, many houses were vandalised and torched. Apart from these, several girls were also allegedly physically abused.

Ahmed Shamim Al Razi, deputy commissioner of Dinajpur, said the attack was inhuman and steps had already been taken to rehabilitate the victims.

But no case was filed in connection with the attack, apparently fearing further attack on the Santal inhabitants.

Meanwhile, several indigenous leaders and rights workers at different programmes in Dhaka and Dinajpur demanded the victims in Habibpur village be compensated and the attackers tried immediately.

"It has been three days but the situation has yet to improve," Rabindranath Soren, president of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, told a press conference at Dinajpur Press Club yesterday.

At a human chain at Shahbagh in the capital, speakers demanded a separate land commission be formed to resolve the land disputes.

BNP to invite PM to Koko's

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console her but had to return without seeing her, meeting sources said.

The leaders believed that they needed some damage control since the government seemed to have gained political mileage while the BNP had lost out.

A senior BNP leader who was present at the closed-door meeting at Khaleda's Gulshan office, said they had decided to ask Khaleda to invite the premier to the Qulkhani and had even drafted a letter for Khaleda to send.

Nazrul Islam Khan, a member of BNP national standing committee, yesterday said, "We will urge the chiefs and leaders of all political parties to attend the Qulkhani and pray for the salvation of the departed soul."

The Qulkhani may be held on Friday at Azad Mosque in Gulshan.

The BNP's senior leaders at the meeting also decided to publicly regret what had happened with the premier on Saturday night.

"It was not appropriate ... not showing proper respect to the prime minister," Moudud told media after the meeting. He also said the BNP chief was unaware of Hasina's visit as she was almost unconscious.

"We could not contact her [Khaleda] as her room door was closed from the inside," Moudud said, adding that senior leaders were unaware that the main gate was locked.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday night had to return from the gate of BNP chief's Gulshan office as it was locked from the inside.

Her desire to console Khaleda after the latter's son passed away had made people hope that a meeting

between the two top leaders might contribute to reducing the rivalry between them, paving the way for talks to end the political impasse.

Alongside people, some ministers and AL senior leaders started criticising the BNP since Sunday for "denying the premier entry into Khaleda's Gulshan office".

Even at the end of the yesterday's cabinet meeting the issue was raised by State Minister for Labour and Employment Mujibul Haq Chunnun. He lauded the prime minister for going to the BNP chief's office.

In response the prime minister said she had been dishonored there, meeting sources claimed.

Some ministers then commented that they had gained politically from the incident but meeting sources quoted her, "I did not go there for any political purpose. As a mother I went there to meet another mother."

Miss Colombia wins Miss Universe

AFP, Doral

Colombia's Paulina Vega was crowned Miss Universe Sunday, beating out contenders from the United States, Ukraine, Jamaica and The Netherlands at the world's top beauty pageant in Florida.

The 22-year-old model and business student triumphed over 87 other women from around the world, and is only the second beauty queen from Colombia to take home the prize.

The last time Colombia won the crown was in 1958 when Luz Marina Zuluaga scored the title.

Vega, wearing a long silver sequined gown, was beaming and tearful as she accepted her sash and crown from reigning Miss Universe, Venezuelan Gabriela Isler.

She edged out first runner-up, Nia Sanchez from the United States, hugging her as the win was announced.

London-born Vega dedicated her title to Colombia and to all her supporters.

"We are proud, this is a triumph, not only personal, but for all those 47 million Colombians who were dreaming with me and were part of this whole process," she told reporters after the win.



She said the title was "more important than the World Cup," and said beauty queens are respected around the world.

For Vega, the win was a point of national pride and she hopes it will put her country on the map.

7 robbers beaten dead in Narsingdi

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The robbers then tied him and threw him into a bed and looted other valuable items.

Meantime, four to five members of the gang broke into the next room, where Azizur's mother and her elder sister were sleeping.

Hearing screams, Azizur's brother, who was in another room, phoned his uncle asking for help, by which time the robbers entered a second house.

His uncle informed the imam who alerted the villagers through the loud speaker of a mosque.

On hearing the announcement, the robbers started running away, but locals from adjacent villages caught eight of them after chasing them about one kilometer.

To create panic among the locals the robbers blasted several crude bombs. A boy suffered minor splinter injuries.

The OC said villagers beat all the eight indiscriminately, leaving seven of them instantly dead.

By this time, police rushed to the spot and saved one of them. He was taken to Narsingdi District Hospital under police custody.

Before entering Chakshal village, the robbers attempted to loot a house in nearby Bodubari village but failed,



Alleged robber Rahim cuffed to his bed at the Narsingdi Sadar Hospital yesterday. He was beaten up by a mob and seven of his alleged cohorts were killed by angry villagers.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

the OC added.

Annoyed by frequent robbery, 10 villages formed vigilant teams two months ago to guard their homes from 10:00pm-5:00am daily.

Chakshal village had no such team and that is why it came under attack, locals said.

Also, the village is in the remote part

of the district. The Sadar Police Station, the closest station, is about 14km from the village.

THE RINGLEADER

The ringleader of Dulal is known to anyone from a 10-year-old to a 70-year-old in Narsingdi's Sadar upazila. He is a listed criminal and served several times in jail for theft and robbery.

But nothing could stop him from continuing his long time profession of robbery. The 55-year-old lives with his wife and son in a three-room brick-built house at Choya village under Sadar upazila.

These correspondents found his house locked from outside yesterday.

Yesterday's robbery was planned at his house, about 5km from the robbery spot, on Sunday afternoon, according to Rahim, the gang member caught by police.

The group members started gathering at Dulal's house since 11:00am on Sunday.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rahim said he and another gang member, Rehan, went to Dulal's house as per their previous plan.

"Dulal briefed us about the plan and distributed sharp weapons among us," he said, while lying on his bed at Narsingdi District Hospital.

Neighbours said Dulal had been a robber for years, although no one could say how long. One woman said police raided his house several times in the past.

OC Abul Kashem said, "We raided his house 10 to 12 times in the last eight months. But we did not find him."

Blockade raises cost

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A number of importers and exporters said they have to pay police personnel for escorting goods-laden trucks to and from ports and factories.

Wishing anonymity, a businessman said he had to pay Tk 1,000 at every police station from Chittagong to his factory in Mymensingh for escorting trucks carrying raw materials for his factory.

Bakhtiar Uddin Ahmed, general manager at Fakir Apparels in Narayanganj, said, "Normally, truck fare from Narayanganj to Chittagong hovers around Tk 15,000. But, now I have to pay Tk 30,000 to 35,000."

He said if the blockade continues, they would have to send goods to various destinations by expensive air shipments to maintain strict lead time set by international retailers.

"We now send goods to port spending additional money to keep our commitments to buyers. If their confidence in us wanes, we will lose everything," said Bakhtiar.

"If we fail to send goods timely,

buyers will switch over to other destinations such as Vietnam, Myanmar, India or Pakistan," he added.

Voicing worries at the ongoing political violence, Atiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said, "Our losses are piling up... we cannot ship our goods. If this situation persists, we will go bankrupt soon."

"Our buyers are concerned about shipments of goods... they are continuously making queries about the political situation in the country," the president of the garment makers' platform told this correspondent yesterday.

A couple of days back, he said a group of US-based garment retailers had written to him and hinted at diverting work orders from Bangladesh to other destinations if the political crisis doesn't end soon.

"The retailers said they are thinking of an alternative to Bangladesh as the ongoing blockade is hampering timely shipment of garment items," he told The Daily Star.

Blockade takes one more life

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last night, according to fire service officials.

People's sufferings saw no respite yesterday as they could not travel from and to the capital with trains running behind schedule on the 21st day of the blockade. The launch service, however, was normal.

Law enforcers detained at least 136 alleged Jamaat-BNP men from eight districts including the capital for their alleged involvement in subversive activities.

In Rangpur, Abdul Malek, who suffered burns in an arson attack near Vatgaon Bridge in Kaharole of Dinajpur Wednesday night, died at the Rangpur Medical College Hospital at 3:00pm, reports our Rangpur correspondent.

The 50-year-old was a small trader in a village under Nilphamari Sadar upazila. He sustained burns when

blockaders set fire to a truck he was riding while returning home from the Bishwa Ijtema, said his wife Mamata Begum.

The truck was fully burnt and Malek and truck driver Rabiul Islam, 45, received severe injuries. They were admitted to Rangpur Medical, where Rabiul is undergoing treatment.

In Thakurgaon, a pick-up van driver was burnt as blockaders torched his vehicle on the Thakurgaon-Dinajpur highway in the sadar upazila's Unotrishmile.

Victim Nazmul Islam, 26, who hails from Sahebgarh Bahalbaria village under Mirpur upazila of Kushtia, told reporters that he was carrying chickens from a Brac office in Bogra with another driver Monirul Islam.

As they reached Unotrishmile around 12:20pm, blockaders barricaded the road with logs and torched it after pouring petrol. Nazmul was stuck

inside, said Monirul.

Police rescued Nazmul and sent him to Dhaka as his condition deteriorated.

After the incident, police and BCB raided adjacent villages and picked up nine persons on suspicion, police sources said.

In Rajshahi, a truck driver and his helper were burnt as alleged blockaders torched the truck in Charghat upazila Sunday night.

The truck drivers Torun Biswas, 45, and Shahabul, 25, were admitted to the burn unit of the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, said police.

In Habiganj, law enforcers arrested three young men from the Sadar upazila's Umednagar area for their alleged link to petrol bomb attacks in different areas, sources said.

One of the arrestees reportedly confessed during interrogation that they had hurled two crude bombs at

the residence of Shahidul Islam, the district's additional superintendent of police, sources added.

In Jhalakathi, miscreants hurled petrol bombs at the house of Awami League leader and Jhalakathi Sadar municipality mayor Afzal Hossain Rana Sunday night, burning parts of a room. None however was hurt, police said.

Meanwhile police arrested Anadi Das, president of Jhalakathi town unit BNP, in connection with an arson at Jhalakathi Bus stand Sunday night. They also detained the ameer of Jhalakathi Sadar municipality Jamaat-e-Islami.

Alleged blockaders set fire to a bus of Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Mymensingh and a truck in Pabna Sunday night and yesterday.

Two trucks were also torched in Sherpur last night, according to fire service officials.

Police asked to intensify

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reportedly considers intensifying the nationwide blockade that enters 22nd day today. The blockade violence already left 31 people dead, over a thousand people injured and 350 vehicles torched.

Law enforcers yesterday arrested 136 people believed to be BNP-Jamaat men in eight districts -- 24 in Chapainawabganj, nine Thakurgaon, three Moulvibazar, two Jhalakathi, 11 Munshiganj, 44 Satkhira, 20 Bogra and 23 in Dhaka.

The intelligence report mentioned that 2,296 leaders of the 20-party alliance are leading the violent activities in the name of blockade. Of them, 1,599 are from the BNP, 695 from Jamaat, two from Islami Oikya Jote and one each from LDP, BJP, Jatiya Gonotantrik Party (Jagpa) and Khelafat-e-Majlish.

Over two lakh leaders and activists of the 20-party combine are

directly involved in the ongoing anti-government movement, and the alliance contemplates engaging another 70 to 80 thousand activists in their agitations in the capital, it said.

The report called for unity among leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League and its front organisations at grassroots to counter the opposition's agitation.

It warned that the opposition might launch attacks on government establishments as well as law enforcers and local administrations. Private factories, including garment units, are also on their list of targets.

The NSI urged the authorities to arrest the 20-party leaders facing several cases and think twice before giving bail to the opposition men now behind bars.

The agency also suggested tracking activities and phone conversations of Hefazat-e-Islam members.