

# BRAHMANBARIA BURNING

The vicious attacks on Hindu homes, establishments and temples since October 30 indicates an increase in the level of bigotry among certain sections of the society. The question is how did these miscreants get the courage to carry out these crimes? The Daily Star talks to some individuals who have been directly affected or are speaking out against these hate crimes. THE INTERVIEWS WERE TAKEN BY ERESH OMAR JAMAL, MOYUKH MAHTAB AND SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN.

## A severe blow for communal harmony

SUVRATA CHOWDHURY

"The incident that happened was very unfortunate. Here we all live together peacefully - Hindus and Muslims. For so many years we have always lived together peacefully, nothing like this has ever happened before. On the north of my house is a temple and on the south is a lake. Beside the lake live Muslims and if we ever have any problem, no matter how big or small, we help each other out and also solve the small differences that we may have amongst ourselves.

When the incident happened, I did not get out. But a boy who works on my farm did and later told me that many people had gathered at the college field. Usually you won't see that many people there even when the President visits. Many microphones were arranged there and we could hear people give speeches. I don't know exactly who 'they' were as I was inside, but we could hear the commotion quite clearly.

As my temple is quite close to my house, I could see around 150 to 200 people attacking it from my home. This happened between 9-10 am. Before that, many people came on boats and cars. The authorities here had continually asked people through microphones to not attack any Hindu house or temple. Despite this the attack took place. Right now, all the people in my neighbourhood and those living adjacent to it are living in extreme fear and panic."

Resident of Nasirnagar

## A wilful attempt to spread chaos

RANA DASGUPTA

"Members of the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad visited Nasirnagar and Habiganj on November 2. We went to Madhavpur first and visited different places where the violence had taken place. And there we came to know that the MP of that area had, within two hours of the incident, gone there from Dhaka as a show of solidarity to the victims.

Interestingly however, the temple in Madhavpur Bazaar was being protected by a SI and a handful of other police personnel. Yet, a few minutes before the attack, he had mysteriously left the spot. It was then that the attack happened. Also, it was the same SI who had filed the case. So we suspect that there might be a connection between the attackers and the SI. How else can you explain him leaving the spot only a few minutes before the attack?

Then we went to Nasirnagar. We visited different spots and also held a discussion. It was there that we heard that even after three days of the attack, Minister Syedul Haq reportedly visited Habiganj and sat in a rest-house with the OC and others. He did not visit any of the affected areas nor did he

come to the assistance of the victims. Later, while we were coming back, we heard him using a very derogatory term against the Hindus, admonishing them for protesting too much.

So what we mainly saw there was an attempt to downplay the attack by 'a handful of miscreants'. This and other indicators seem to point towards a conspiracy and a disturbing attempt to cover it up. What we felt is that it wasn't failure on part of the authorities. It was a conspiracy, which included a few members from within the ranks of the authorities and various other organisations and political parties. And the aim of the conspiracy was to destabilise the country and create divisions. It was a wilful attempt to spread chaos.

The authorities immediately need to investigate the attacks, find the perpetrators and the masterminds, and punish them exemplarily. Further attempts to cause violence and create divisions must be thwarted. We must all work together so that the conspirators are not successful in their devious attempts."

Advocate at Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad.

## Inaction leads to impunity

KHUSHI KABIR

"The situation started just like Ramu with a story of a Facebook post which sparked off the rest. The administration had arrested this guy who is supposed to have made the post. We heard in Brahmanbaria that he was not even very literate, does not have a Facebook account, and does not know how to use Photoshop. He is from a fishing community. The guy was arrested. Then two groups asked for permission to hold a rally, and they were given the permission. After the rally, they started attacking the temples and houses.

The women and children who had to hide during the attacks, you could see the trauma in their eyes. Many of them had to cross the river and hide, and only came back later. The main thing is the fear and the trauma that has been created, apart from the fact that they had lost everything they had.

There is a pattern of what has been happening time and again. We have seen the story of Facebook posts in Pabna, in Satkhira and many other places. This was done to create a situation to foster communalism.

The administration did tell us it wasn't just one group of people involved in the attacks -people from all political parties were there for looting.

So obviously there is an attempt across the country to try to create insecurity in the minds of the minority and push forward an intolerant, extremist version of Islam. Before this in Brahmanbaria, there have been attacks involving burning of Ahmadiya houses.

We asked the administration first if they knew about the Facebook post that was circulating. They said that they did, and had already arrested the guy. So if they had already arrested them, we asked, why did they allow the rally in the first place?

The next question was why after giving permission for the rally, there wasn't enough protection provided? We had heard from some people there that the attacks happened after the police had left.

But we do know that the MP, who is also the Minister for Fisheries, did not visit any of the houses of the affected. And after he went there four days later, he was reported to have made a communal remark, which he later claimed he didn't. But the important thing is right after his visit, there was another attack.

How can the administration be so laid back? The intelligence agencies are supposed to provide intelligence. The administration says they were inactive they didn't have information: so what were the various intelligence agencies doing after the first attacks?

How is administration allowing this to happen? They don't have the courage to act. Either they are completely detached, or they are complicit. Through their inactivity, they are giving impunity to people to create this havoc.

These Facebook posts that are being created are obviously being created by people who have an interest in creating these situations to loot property and land. The administration is giving a very wrong message by asking people from posting anything that hurts religious sentiments instead of taking action against the perpetrators. We ask, what about the religious sentiments of the Hindus?"

Rights activist and coordinator of Nijera Kori



PHOTO: STAR

## Locals have nothing to do with the attacks

KAJOL DUTTA

"I was at home when I heard about the incident. I immediately rushed to one of the houses that was attacked and saw that a stack of hay there was set on fire. I saw idols destroyed.

People are living in fear and panic. Although there are many police personnel around, given what has happened, you can understand why people are so scared.

The police were not able to protect all houses, and those were the ones that were mostly attacked. As the roads were also blocked, these people were setting houses on fire from behind. Those who have no police protection are now asking how they can stay alive and escape this violence.

No one from my village was involved with what happened here. Even my own house was attacked. When the Muslims who live here

came to protect my house, they too were injured. There was a meeting between two Muslim organisations, Ahle Sunnat and Hefazat-e-Islam, on Saturday. I think it was the outsiders gathered at the meeting who perpetrated the attack. But we have no idea why they would do this. Why are they tormenting us? What good would it bring them?"

Hindu community leader (Narsinagar)

## Law should be equal for all

JYOTIRMOY BARUA

"I think the repeated attacks on the minorities of Nasirnagar pose a serious challenge to the secular values of the country. At the same time it challenges the politics of the ruling party. It seems from the activities and comments of local politicians, particularly the minister that they are in some way involved in the violence. But it needs to be investigated seriously.

The role of the local administration is also questionable. They did not take any measures to contain the violence. It seems that they let the attacks happen. The UNO himself joined the protest programme, and his comments worsened the situation. A criminal case should be filed against him.

Now I want to indicate to some crucial points of the ongoing investigation and trial of the case. In the Ramu incident, more than 14,000 people were primarily accused. After investigation, charges were filed against only 384 persons. What happened to the other people? They were harassed by the police. In the Nasirnagar case, police has filed cases against more than one thousand people, and many of them are unnamed. Why are they unnamed? The perpetrators did the crime in open day light. They were mobilising people for quite a few days before the attacks. Are the police trying to hide the real culprits by hiding the details. Another aspect is the 'arrest business' and harassing of political and personal rivals. We have seen similar things in the Ramu case.

Witness protection is another important matter in delivering justice in this type of cases. In the trial process of the Ramu attack, we found that many witnesses though primarily gave testimony to the police, later refused to do so in court; some even gave hostile statements. It indicates that the witnesses were somehow forced to remain silent. Our law enforcing agencies do not provide enough protection to witnesses, which ultimately hinders the trial process.

Again we have seen Rasraj was arrested under section 57 of the ICT Act. It is a strict legal provision and the punishment is equally harsh. But we will see that those people who attacked the minority people and looted their house and broke temples are not implicated under similar strict regulations. I think there should equal punishment for similar kind of offences, though I am not personally in favour of using Section 57. Under section 259, 295 Ka, 298 of the penal code these serious crimes can be properly tried. In the case of Rasraj, we have seen that the magistrate did not give him the scope of defending his position. In a recent case of Daudkandi, we have seen that a person from the majority community posted an offensive post against the Hindu religion. The person was primarily arrested by the police. Later the person said sorry in another post saying that his account was hacked. The police let him go. I am not saying that the person should be prosecuted, but my point is that law should be equally applied for all."

Supreme Court lawyer and human rights activist

## Unpardonable negligence


ENAMUL HOQUE CHOWDHURY

"I headed the investigation team formed by the National Human Rights Commission, and visited Nasirnagar soon after the incident. We went to every house and temple affected by the attack and talked to the victims. In my observation, it was a pre-planned serial attack. It was so coordinated that attacks on different places happened at the same time. The extremist groups were planning the attack for quite some days and people from remote upazilas were also found involved in the violence. It seems to me that various interest groups joined hands to execute their vicious plan. For example, the local poor fishermen are the worst victims of the attack. Most of them are engaged in fishing in local beels that have been the target of a certain interest group for a long time. After the attack, almost all the fishermen left the village. It seems that the poorest sections of the Hindu community were basically targeted in this attack, so that they lose what little resource they have, and thus are forced to leave their homes and business behind, which most probably will be grabbed by the influential locals.

The role of the local administration is quite questionable. The OC of the local police station himself confessed that when the attack occurred he was present at a temple. When he found that the mob was nearing the temple he was visiting, he left the place. The UNO of the area is also guilty of negligence. He gave permission to hold rallies despite rumours of propaganda of a vicious activity such as this. In fact, it was even announced over microphones by some quarters that the Hindus should be 'decimated'. He could have easily withdrawn the permission. But either he was unmindful or did not seem to care about the consequences. The comments of the local politicians, especially those of the minister, are totally irresponsible.

We have submitted our investigation report within the shortest possible time. And the government has taken it very seriously. I hope the culprits will be identified soon and will be given exemplary punishment. Now, the government has deployed BGB to protect the area. It should have been done immediately after the first attacks, so that we could have prevented the subsequent ones. Following the Nasirnagar incident, attacks on minorities were reported in various parts of the country. If we can ensure proper punishment in every case, the sense of impunity that perpetrators feel will definitely be shattered and the recurrence of communal violence can be prevented in the future."

Commissioner, National Human Rights Commission



**Strengthening of Leather Research Institute-Project**  
 Bangladesh Council of Scientific & Industrial Research  
 Nayarhat, Savar, Dhaka-1350

### Invitation for Tender

1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Science & Technology.				
2. Agency	Bangladesh Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (BCSIR).				
3. Procuring entity name	Project Director.				
4. Invitation for	Procurement of Laboratory Equipment.				
5. Invitation Ref. No.	39.345.2672.00.06.5001.16/17				
<b>KEY INFORMATION</b>					
6. Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (International).				
<b>FUNDING METHOD</b>					
7. Budget and source of fund	GOB.				
<b>PARTICULAR INFORMATION</b>					
8. Project/programme code	5001				
9. Project/programme name	Strengthening of Leather Research Institute.				
10. Tender package name	Procurement of Goods.				
11. Tender last selling date	18.12.2016 up to 3:00pm.				
12. Tender closing date and time	19.12.2016 up to 3:00pm.				
13. Tender opening date and time	19.12.2016 at 3:30pm.				
14. Name and addresses of the office: Selling & receiving tender document	Office of the Project Director, Strengthening of Leather Research Institute, Room No. 504, 4th Floor, Dr. Qudrat-I- Khuda Science Building, BCSIR, Dhaka-1205.				
15. Opening tender documents	Office of the Project Director, Strengthening of Leather Research Institute, Room No. 504, 4th Floor, Dr. Qudrat-I- Khuda Science Building, BCSIR, Dhaka-1205.				
<b>INFORMATION FOR TENDERER</b>					
16. Eligibility of tenderer	Minimum 5 years experience on supply, installation, commissioning and application of UTM, Belt sole flexing machine, Bally finish tester, Bally Flexometer, Color fastness tester, Lace to lace abrasion, Lace to eyelet abrasion and DIN Abrasion Tester and related services.				
17. Brief description of goods	As per schedule specification.				
18. Price of tender document (Tk)	5000.00 (five thousand) taka only, non-refundable.				
Group	Lot No.	Identification lot	Location	Tender security amount (Tk) (refundable)	Completion time in weeks
19.	01	a. Supply & Installation of PC Controlled Universal Tensile Testing Machine and accessories. b. Supply & Installation of Belt sole flexing machine and accessories. c. Supply & Installation of Bally finish tester & accessories. d. Supply & Installation of Bally Flexometer in freeze & accessories. e. Supply & Installation of Color fastness to perspiration tester & accessories. f. Supply & Installation of Lace to Lace resistance tester & accessories. g. Supply & Installation of Lace to Eyelet resistance tester & accessories. h. Supply & Installation of Din Abrasion Tester & accessories.	Dhaka	2.5% of quoted price	13 weeks from date of notification of award
<b>PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS</b>					
20. Name of official inviting tender	Dr. Md. Tushar Uddin.				
21. Designation of official inviting tender	Project Director, Strengthening of Leather Research Institute.				
22. Address of the official inviting tender	Room No. 504, 4th Floor, Dr. Qudrat-I- Khuda Science Building, BCSIR, Dhaka-1205.				
23. Contact details of official inviting tender	Mobile: 01712211719; E-mail: pd.slr5001@gmail.com				
24. The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or to reject any or all tenders.					

Dr. Md. Tushar Uddin  
Project Director

GD-2248