

THE DAILY Star ON FRIDAY

www.thedailystar.net

PLUS HALF PAGE JACKET ON BURGER KING

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXVI No. 320

AGRAHAYAN 25, 1423 BS

Your Right to Know

RABIUL AWAL 8, 1438 HJRI

22 PAGES PLUS THE STAR PRICE : Tk 12.00

On October 30, hundreds of religious zealots launched a synchronised attack on six Hindu villages in Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar upazila and vandalised 100 houses and 17 temples. They also looted whatever valuables they could find. Before the attack, they spread communal hatred for two days using a Facebook post on the wall of a Hindu fisherman. To instigate and mobilise people, the post was shared among the locals via phone and hard copies. But who pulled the strings, why and how? M Abul Kalam Azad and Rashidul Hasan try to explain all this after talking to over 100 locals who are "convinced" that political ambition of a ruling Awami League lawmaker played a big role.

ATTACK ON HINDUS IN BRAHMANBARIA

Ambition, not religion

3 investigations failed to find masterminds, motives but people seem to know who, why



Sayedul Hoque Obaidul Mukhtar Jahangir Alam Atiqur Rahman Akhi

Three government investigations could not find out the motive behind the attack on the Hindus in Nasirnagar and its masterminds. But interestingly, locals seem to know it all.

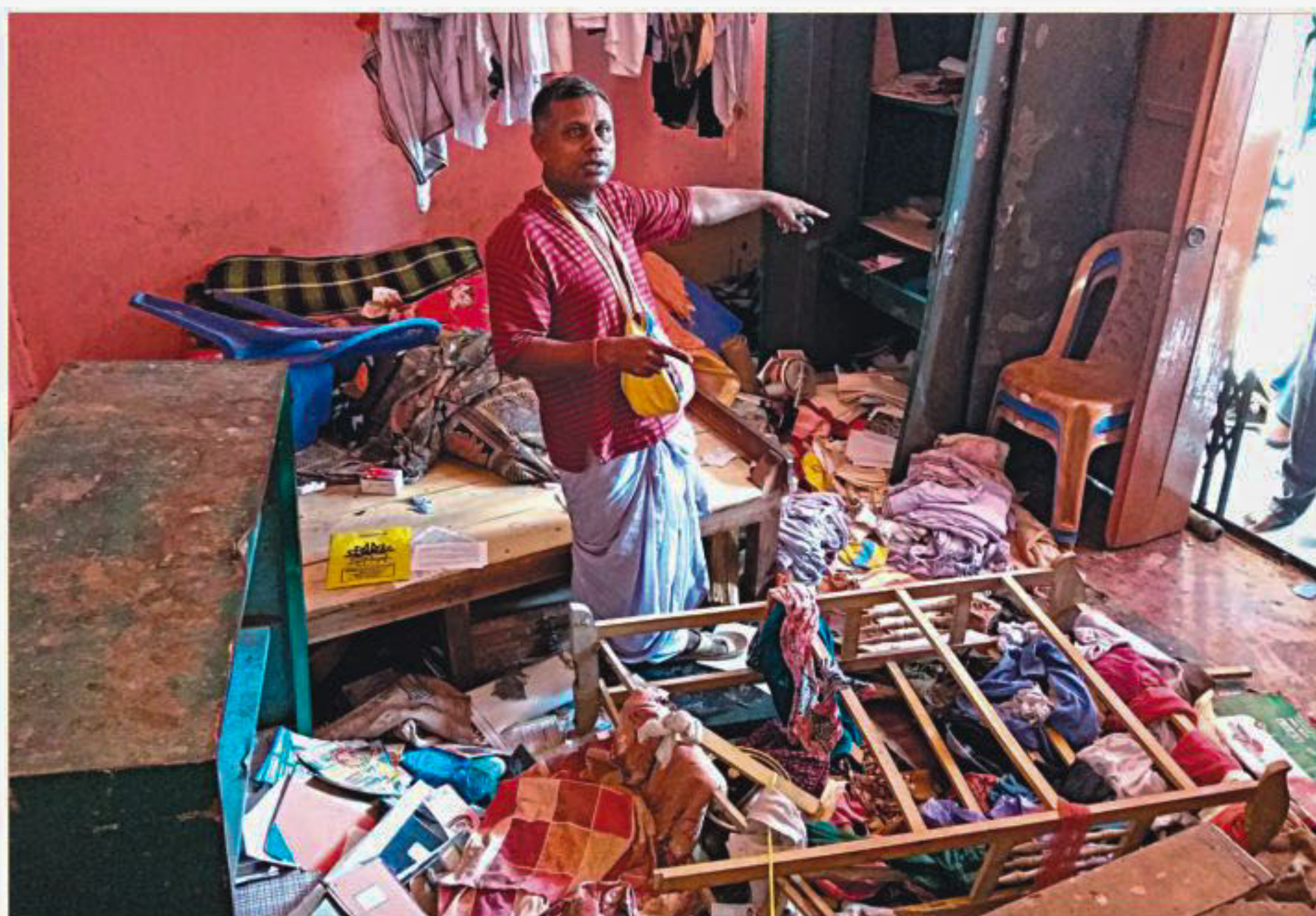
The Daily Star has spent 10 days in the area, talking to about 100 people from different levels, and they tell one identical story: That the attacks were instigated for political gains and the issue of religious sentiment was only secondary.

As they allege, the plan for the October 30 mayhem stemmed from bitter rivalries between two Awami League stalwarts in Brahmanbaria politics. One is a minister and the other a lawmaker. If the minister can be forced to quit, opportunity would open up for the lawmaker to climb up the political ladder and even become a minister.

Everyone -- from farmers to politicians to top district officials -- is aware of the toxic relations of the two -- Sayedul Haque, 74, a five-time lawmaker and minister of fisheries, and Obaidul Mukhtar Chowdhury, 61, a former bureaucrat-turned politician.

None of the sources, however, agreed to go on record for fear of retribution or citing

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



A Hindu priest shows a vandalised room of another priest at Goura Temple in Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar on October 31, a day after the attack on the Hindus in the upazila.

PHOTO: FILE PHOTO

How attacks carried out

The grounds for the attack on the Hindus in Brahmanbaria were prepared in a remote bazaar on the bank of the Titas river on October 29, some 13km from Nasirnagar upazila headquarters where the mayhem took place the next day.

Who pulled the trigger? How was the ground created? And who were involved in the initial hours?

It was Jahangir Alam, 30, owner of Al-Amin Cyber Point and Studio at Horinber Bazar, who played an active role in inciting the locals against Rasraj Das, after a post demeaning Islam appeared on the Hindu fisherman's Facebook wall.

Jahangir also gave provocative speeches about the post. The Daily Star learnt this after talking with more than a dozen eyewitnesses, both Hindu and Muslim, and victims. Two of the witnesses happened to be at Horinber Bazar where a group of charged youth gathered "to punish" Rasraj for the post.

These two sources in particular, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, know Jahangir and several other attackers personally.

Jahangir Alam, now in jail for his alleged role, was once known as a BNP-Jamaat supporter until Dewan Atiqur Rahman Akhi became chairman of Haripur union in April. Akhi ran in the election on AL ticket and made Jahangir his right hand man after his victory.

"When I went near Jahangir's shop around 1:00pm [on October 29], he was telling a group of people that Rasraj committed a big crime for which he should be severely punished," said one source.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Two missing youths contacted families

STAR REPORT

At least two of the nine youths, who disappeared in the last couple of weeks, have contacted their families but haven't mentioned why they went away.

Of the two, Niamatullah, 16, a madrasa student in Barisal's Agailjhara upazila, sent a message to his mother's mobile phone on December 3, three days after he had gone missing. He asked his mother not to worry about him.

The other youth, Tanvir Ahmed, 21, a third-year student of Pabna Medical College, called his father Nur Alam, a government employee in Rangpur, on November 30 and told him

SEE PAGE 13 COL 4

Migration cost goes up, wages not so

Remittance earners face hard times, brokers make things worse

PORIMOL PALMA

Nurul Islam spent just Tk 17,000 when he migrated to Saudi Arabia for work in 1985 as his employing company paid for his visa and the airfare.

His monthly salary was around 400 Riyals. It took him two months to recover the cost of his migration. He could save a handsome amount too.

"Today's reality, however, is different.

"Now the cost of migration is a lot more, but wages are low. It takes about two years to recoup the migration cost," said Nurul Islam, 48, once a happy migrant worker in a security company, and now a migrant rights activist in Narsingdi working to create awareness.

He claimed that the state of the migrants has worsened over the years despite enactment of so many laws and building of new

MIGRATION COST VS WAGE

BANGLADESHI WORKERS (SAUDI ARABIA)

	AVERAGE COST	AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGE
1985	Tk 20,000	Tk 8,000
1990	Tk 1 lakh	Tk 10,000
2000	Tk 2 lakh	Tk 12,000
2016	Tk 6 lakh	Tk 15,000

SOURCE: NGOS, MIGRANTS, RECRUITERS, OFFICIALS

institutions to serve them.

The case of Mohammad Sabuj, 28, is a case in point.

Sabuj went to Qatar spending Tk 3.25 lakh that he borrowed on 30 percent annual interest from his relatives. He spent the amount for the trip as the broker, a relative in Qatar, told him that he could earn Qatari Riyal 2,000 (some 44,000 taka) a month as a driver.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

PM's India visit end of January

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will pay her proposed state visit to India at the end of January next year when New Delhi will give her "a very warm welcome."

According to sources in the foreign ministry, officials of both India and Bangladesh had discussed a tentative schedule, December 18-19.

But the Indian government is now planning to invite Hasina to India's Republic Day parade on January 26 as the chief guest, a source in the Prime Minister's Office in Bangladesh told The Daily Star.

"There is no question of postponement or deferring of Sheikh Hasina's visit when dates have not yet

SEE PAGE 12 COL 3

EC formation after talks with all parties: PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said in parliament that President Abdul Hamid would form the new Election Commission after holding discussions with all political parties.

"The honourable president [Abdul Hamid] has taken the initiative [to form the EC]. He will hold talks with all political parties and form the Election Commission accordingly. We will observe the way he [president] forms the Election Commission, and we will accept it," she said.

The PM was delivering her winding-up speech of the 13th session of the 10th Jatiya Sangsad with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair.

"We want that elections are held in a free, fair and neutral manner. It was Awami League that fought for establishing people's right to vote.

"Many of our leaders sacrificed their lives for this. We want that a fair democratic trend continues [in the country]," Hasina, also president of the AL, said.

On the BNP chief Khaleda Zia's proposal on EC formation, she said, "BNP has sent their opinion to Bangabhaban.

SEE PAGE 12 COL 6



TOP! QUOTE

"Rohingya issue is a political problem, and it cannot be resolved militarily."

PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA
PM'S PRESS SECRETARY IHSANUL KARIM QUOTED HER AS TELLING
DANISH ENVOY MIKAEL HEMNITI
WINTER AT HER OFFICE

Rajshahi AL leader returns 8-hrs after abduction

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Local Awami League leader Kamrul Islam, who was picked up by four unidentified men from his metal shop in the city on Wednesday afternoon, returned home at night after the abductors abandoned him in a dried up wetland in Darusha of Poba upazila.

The trauma of being confined for about eight and a half hours haunts the general secretary of the city AL's ward-19 unit.

During captivity, Kamrul's captors took away his mobile phone. They even did not give him anything to eat.

Talking to The Daily Star at his home in the city's Assam Colony, the 48-year-old yesterday said he could not identify his abductors, but they seemed to be law enforcers.

According to Kamrul, he was in his shop around 2:30pm on Wednesday when two men called him

SEE PAGE 12 COL 2

HARD-PRESSED, THEY FIGHT TO SURVIVE



Assisted by his 11-year-old nephew Santo Kumar Das, Pabitra Das pulls the plough himself on a paddy field in Hakaluki Haor area of Moulvibazar as the poor farmer cannot even afford to buy cattle to do the task. Pabitra says they have to do such inhuman labour only to feed their families. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

NEWS ANALYSIS

It's very much possible

Shining examples of consensus in our politics hold out hope for EC

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Formation of the new Election Commission on the basis of consensus among political parties is not an impossible task if the parties draw inspiration from the very examples they set in the past.

Politicians including Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia who are now leading major parties have track record of forging consensus on important issues including formation of EC.

They did it by demonstrating their political wisdom and sagacity for the sake of restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1990s.

Take examples of some significant political consensus.

After the fall of autocratic ruler General Ershad on December 6, 1990, they reached a consensus on formation of new EC to hold a free and fair parliamentary election held in February, 1991.

On the basis of consensus, a Supreme Court judge, Justice Abdur Rouf, was appointed as chief election commissioner and two SC judges -- Justice Syed Misbah Uddin Hossain and Justice Naimuddin Ahmed -- were made election commissioners.

An EC acceptable to all can ensure congenial electoral atmosphere and contribute to improvement of political culture too. The EC-led by Justice Rouf remains as an example of it.

On an initiative by the EC, an electoral code of conduct was finalised unanimously for political parties and candidates contesting the parliamentary election.

Representatives of as many as 67 political parties joined a dialogue organised by the EC on January 24, 1991, and accepted the code of conduct and reached an agreement that they would abide by the code of conduct in the run up

SEE PAGE 12 COL 1