

25 injured in AL factional clash in Hatiya

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

At least 25 people were injured, 13 of them bullet-hit, in a clash between two factions of the ruling Awami League at Hatiya upazila yesterday.

The activists also vandalised at least four houses during the clash at Char King union.

According to witnesses, the clash erupted between the supporters of former lawmaker Mohammad Ali and Chairman of Char King Union Parishad Mohiuddin over establishing supremacy in the area.

"A group of 15-20 people led by Abu Taher, Murad and Didar, who are known as supporters of Mohammad Ali, came to the Bridge Bazar area around 7:00am. Suddenly they opened fire on members of the other faction and also stabbed some of them," said Shahjahan, member of Ward-7 of Char King union.

The other faction also retaliated.

Of the injured, Yousuf, 25, Abdul Quader, 45, Joynal, 24, Abdul Quddus, 45, Mahmudul Haque, 25, Abdul Hai, 48, Abdul Hakim, 45, Yousuf, 27, Nabir Uddin, 32, Rubel, 26, Abdur Rahim, 24, Nazim Uddin, 30, and Jewel, 28, were bullet hit.

They are taking treatment at

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MP LITON KILLING: An AL leader involved in plot: police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Five arrestees, including prime suspect Abdul Kader Khan, have said local Awami League leader Chandon Kumar Sarker was involved in plotting the murder of AL lawmaker Manzurul Islam Liton, claimed Rabiul Islam, additional superintendent of Gaibandha police.

Chandon, former office secretary of Sundarganj upazila unit AL, gave

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A stray dog tugging the dress of a protester while cops try to drag her away during a half-day hartal in the capital yesterday. The picture went viral on Facebook. Some leftist political parties called for the shutdown protesting the hike in gas price. Right, a procession marches past flaming debris on the street. Police use water cannon on protesters to disperse them. Cops scuffle with a demonstrator. The photos were taken in the city's Shahbag intersection.



HC stays 2nd phase of gas price hike

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decided to implement the hike in two phases.

As per the new prices effective from this month, households using double burners would pay Tk 800 instead of the current Tk 650 while those using single burners would pay Tk 750 instead of Tk 600. The prices were supposed to be further increased by Tk 150 each from June 1.

The HC bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice JBM Hassan came up with the order and the ruling following a writ petition filed by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), challenging the legality of the public notification.

Architect Mubassher Hossain, convener of national complaints handling committee of CAB, submitted the petition on Monday, saying that the authorities can increase gas prices once a year under the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Act, 2003. However, they have decided to hike it twice in the same year.

POLICE POUNCE ON PROTESTERS

Police used water cannon and lobbed tear gas at leftist activists who were enforcing a six-hour hartal in the capital yesterday protesting against the gas tariff hike.

The strike began at 6:00am. An hour later, activists of Progotishil Chhatra Jote, an alliance of student bodies of leftist parties, started demonstrating at

Shahbagh.

After they tried to block the Shahbagh intersection around 10:30am, police dispersed them using water cannon and firing tear gas.

A chase and counter-chase followed.

Police lobbed over 30 tear gas canisters. The picketers retaliated by throwing brick chips at the law enforcers.

Around noon, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), and Gonotantrik Bam Morcha, an alliance of leftist parties, threatened to besiege the power, energy and mineral resources ministry on March 15, if the government did not withdraw its decision to hike the gas prices by that time.

"We will protest for a fortnight from March 1 to March 14," Zonayed Saki, coordinator of Gonosambhati Andolan, said at a programme in the Jatiya Press Club. "Then, we will besiege the ministry."

Contacted, Liton Nandi, vice-president of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, told The Daily Star, "Police pounced on us without any reason or warning. They detained 14 of our activists".

CPB and BSD activists also demonstrated on DB Road in Gaibandha town during the hartal yesterday.

BNP SIT-INTOMORROW

BNP yesterday announced that it would stage countrywide sit-in tomorrow, protesting the gas price hike.

"The sit-in will be observed from 10:00am to 12:00noon," BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed said at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan central office.

He, however, did not elaborate on the programme.

"The government's decision to increase gas prices is nothing but the reflection of its undemocratic character. The government does not hesitate to ignore people's will as it considers them to be animals," he said.

The government hiked gas tariff "five times", he claimed.

"There are many problems in the country. But, the government has no time to pay any attention to those," Rizvi added.



Masud Rana

Ishaque Ali

Shakhawat Hossain

Liton Mia

Ahsanullah Ansari

5 to die for Hoshi killing

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country's image, destabilise law and order, and hamper economic growth of the country.

"It's a planned murder which the killers carried out giving wrong interpretation of Islam," the judge said.

Investigators said the JMB men rented a flat in Noorpur area of Rangpur city five months before the killing. They pretended to be cloth traders.

Rana shot Hoshi while Nazrul Islam alias Bike Hasan, now deceased, was driving the bike, they said.

The court acquitted Abu Sayeed who according to the charge sheet is a JMB operative. Sayeed is accused of murdering Rahamat Ali, 55, an attendant of a shrine in Rangpur.

Rahamat was hacked to death in November, 2015.

Less than a week after Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella was killed in the capital, Kunio was killed in a similar fashion.

Islamic State had claimed responsibility for the murders which sparked widespread condemnation at home

and abroad and grabbed the attention of the international media.

The government has maintained that IS does not exist in the country.

Investigators had insisted that the JMB, which gained notoriety orchestrating the near simultaneous bomb blasts in 63 districts on August 17, 2005, was behind the assassination of Hoshi.

In July last year, police submitted the charge sheet against eight JMB operatives, but two names had been dropped after they were killed in "shootouts" with law enforcers.

Nazrul Islam alias Bike Hasan was killed in a gunfight with Rab in Rajshahi on August 5 last year while Saddam Hossain was killed during a "shootout" in Dhaka on January 1 with members of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit.

Rathish Chandra Bhowmik, special public prosecutor of the special court, said they were happy with the verdict but would appeal to a higher court against the acquittal of Abu Sayeed.

Defence lawyer Aftab Hossain said they would also file an appeal against

the verdict after getting the full copy of the judgment.

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday expressed satisfaction over the verdict and termed it "an example of a fast trial".

"If such fast trials continue in future, there will be no case backlogs," he told reporters during a briefing at his secretariat office.

The court delivered the verdict in 60 working days, examining evidence and recording testimonies of 56 witnesses.

Kaunia police had filed a case accusing unidentified criminals following the murder. The investigation officer of the case pressed charges against the JMB men on July 3 last year and the special court framed charges against seven of them on November 15.

Initially, police arrested 10 people in connection with the killing, including Rashedunnabi Khan Biplob member of Rangpur City BNP, Humayun Kabir Hira, business partner of Kunio Hoshi, Nawshad Hossain Rubel, Kazal Chandra Barman, and Razib Hossain of Rangpur city.

Their names were dropped in the chargesheet.

HAIJ IRREGULARITIES JS body forms sub-committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday formed a subcommittee to investigate alleged irregularities in preregistration of Bangladeshis willing to perform Hajj this year under private management.

The parliamentary standing committee on the religious affairs ministry formed the five-member body, headed by ruling Awami League MP Bazlul Haque Haroon, at a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The subcommittee was asked to submit its report in the next meeting likely to be held within a month, Haroon told reporters, adding that the move was taken following media reports on the alleged irregularities.

Yesterday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan told parliament that 66,014 police members faced disciplinary actions on different charges in the last five years.

Of them, 61,910 were given light punishment, 3,600 major punishment and 504 police members were sacked or sent into forced retirement as part of departmental actions, he said while replying to lawmakers' queries.

In the scripted reply, Kamal, however, did not explain the nature of the light and major punishment.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, a police official said major punishment in the force usually includes

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Who's to blame

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Then on Monday, a Dhaka court sentenced a truck driver to death over the death of a woman in a 2003 accident in Savar.

In protest, transport workers extended their strike to other parts of the country without any formal announcement. It was rather organised through telephone conversations among transport sector leaders.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, about a dozen transport workers of different categories said senior leaders of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation asked them not to operate their buses and trucks across the country.

Federation leaders denied this, saying the strike was spontaneous.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, also executive president of the Federation, even denied there was any strike.

Talking to a private TV, he said, "There is no strike. The workers have voluntarily abstained from work. They did not call any strike."

Commuters in the capital yesterday woke up to see only a small number of inter-city buses plying the streets.

Those who planned to travel outside Dhaka were among the worst sufferers as almost no long-haul buses left the city's bus terminals - Gabtoli, Sayedabad and Mohakhali. People of other districts also suffered, as hardly any buses left for Dhaka or elsewhere, according to commuters and transport workers.

Thousands then thronged railway stations or launch terminals to reach their destinations within and outside the districts. The Kamalapur station in the capital was packed with travellers.

At a rally at the capital's Gabtoli, transport workers vowed to continue their protest until their demand for getting "justice" is met. They alleged that the trials in the lower courts were held under wrong provisions of the law, which carry higher punishments.

They called upon Shajahan Khan to discuss the matter with the prime minister.

The workers are now protesting the sentences against their two fellows, Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, told The Daily Star.

SUFFERINGS

As a result of the sudden abstention from work, businesses are counting huge losses as perishable goods like fruits, vegetables and fish are rotting at various land and river ports as well as wholesale markets across the country, our correspondents say.

Trucker Arshad Ali was carrying vegetables to Chittagong from Bogra yesterday. He said the item would perish if he got stuck on the way for long hours.

In Khulna, some 37 foreign visitors got stranded. They have been staying at different hotels and guesthouses.

Alisa Sokolova, an Australian development worker doing some research on the Sundarbans, went to Khulna on Sunday morning.

"I could not even visit the Sundarbans yet. Neither do I have any scope to return to Dhaka," said Alisa.

FINGERS POINTED AT TOP FEDERATION LEADERS

Transport workers said they had full backing of the Federation leaders and that their protest would continue until they got government assurance of "justice".

"Our senior leaders have asked us not to operate transports. If I operate, I would face problems," said a driver at Gabtoli bus terminal, adding that he too had support for the strike.

Earlier on Monday night, leaders of road transport owners and workers sat with Shajahan Khan and also State Minister for Rural Development and Co-operatives Mashiur Rahman Ranga to discuss the initial strike enforced in 10 southern districts. The meeting took place at Shajahan Khan's residence.

Mashiur is also president of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association.

"During the meeting, we came to know that a court in Dhaka gave death penalty to a driver. It sparked anger among workers' leaders who were firm about work abstention," said a road transport owner, who was present at the meeting.

"The top federation leaders gave us the go-ahead to continue our programme [strike]," he said, asking not to be named.

But Federation General Secretary Osman Ali said, "The Federation did not call the strike; workers did. The workers even stopped working spontaneously. Had the Federation called the strike, we would have done so through a press conference."

Shajahan Khan did not pick up the call for comments.

WORK ABSTENTION "ILLOGICAL"

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader termed the work abstention "illogical" and called on the workers to call off the strike immediately.

"People have no link with the court verdict. Why would the people suffer then? You [workers] should immediately withdraw the illogical work abstention," he told a programme in the capital.

PM's Special Envoy and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad at another programme called on the government to take a tough stance against the strike.

As of last night however, transport workers were hell-bent on continuing their protest and there was no visible steps from the government to solve the crisis.

[Our correspondents from Chittagong, Munshiganj, Bogra, Comilla, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Chandpur, Rajshahi, Manikganj, Jhalakathi and Pirojpur contributed to this report.]

Earth filling stopped, DC tells HC

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report to it in two weeks and said it would take appropriate measures against him if his statement was found to be incorrect.

The DC appeared before the HC bench of Justice Md Ashfaqul Islam and Justice Ashish Ranjan and made the statement as per its February 14 order.

The court adjourned the hearing on the contempt petition for two weeks and temporarily exempted the DC from personal appearance before it.

Several hundred acres of croplands have been damaged with sand filling in the upazila since the HC in 2014 issued an injunction against the activity, alleged local villagers.

In response to a public interest litigation, the HC in March that year banned destruction of ecologically-sensitive agricultural land, adjoining wetlands and ecology along the Meghna river in Jainpur, Chaihisya, Char Bhabnathpur, Bhatibanda,

Pirojpur and Ratanpur moujas in Sonargaon.

On February 14, the HC summoned the Narayanganj DC to appear before it to explain the actual situation of croplands and wetlands in the upazila, where a vast land was allegedly being sand-filled flouting the HC's injunction as well as to inform the court about the steps taken by the government to comply with its order.

The bench passed the summons order following a petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela).

The Bela submitted the petition on February 6 seeking an order on 12 respondents, including Rabbi, to appear before it. But the court only asked the DC to appear before it.

The respondents include secretaries to the housing and public works, land, environment and forest and home ministries; the director general, a director and a deputy director of the Department of Environment (DoE);

the upazila nirbahi officer and assistant commissioner (land) of Sonargaon; and the managing directors of Unique Property Development Limited and Sonargaon Economic Zone.

The HC on January 22 asked the respondents to explain why its order to stop destruction of land in six moujas of Sonargaon upazila has not been complied with yet.

The sand filling was started by the real estate developer in 2009 for building a resort city. It was stopped for two years following a court injunction. But later the sand filling resumed for the private Sonargaon Economic Zone with a different company Unique Hotel and Resort Ltd of the same business conglomerate.

In September last year, the company made preparations to resume earth filling for the private economic zone. The Bela on October 2 served a legal notice on the company and the DoE, bringing contempt charges against them.