



People light candles outside the parliament building in Athens of Greece to commemorate the victims of a wildfire that left at least 91 dead. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Outrage over Shajahan's smile, remarks

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alleging a link between one of his relatives and Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan, the company that owned the bus involved in Sunday's accident.

Talking to reporters, the minister, however, claimed that none of his relatives had any links with the bus operator.

On Sunday, a bus ploughed into a crowd waiting for transport near the Airport Road flyover ramp, leaving two students dead on the spot. At least nine others were injured.

Shajahan, also the executive president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, apparently tried to downplay the loss of lives that day.

When reporters asked him about the accident, the minister, with a broad smile, threw a counter question at them.

"A road crash has claimed 33 lives in India's Maharashtra; but do they talk about it like the way we do?" he asked.

The remark and the smile caused a furore on social media.

"Weird, horrible smile: an expression of inhumanity and lack of conscience," one Mohammad Anwarul

Haque wrote on Facebook.

There were many more similar comments.

Talking to reporters at his secretariat office yesterday, Shajahan said, "Students are demanding my resignation. They can do that. But I want to ask them will my resignation solve the problem? I will resign if it solves the problem."

"However, the problems I have solved in so many days have to be taken into account."

He said many of these students did not "play their due role" in preventing the rise of militancy and arson attacks in 2015, but transport workers kept transport system active even after the death of 92 workers.

Queried whether he would apologise for his comments the previous day, Shajahan said, "I am not supposed to apologise. Those who are responsible for the accident will apologise. However, as I am involved in workers' politics, I am expressing my deep shock."

To another query, he said, "None of my relatives has any links with Jabal-e-Noor."

He said his brother-in-law was one

of the 12 directors of the bus operator. However, he is not linked with the company for the last five years.

Contacted, Zakir Hossain, chairman of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan, said the minister's brother-in-law Nannu Mia severed ties with the company more than a year ago.

The name of the owner of the bus, responsible for the accident, was Jahangir Alam, not Nannu Mia, he added.

Shajahan also claimed the number of accidents has come down due to his repeated meetings with transport owners, reports UNB.

He also said a meeting with bus owners was slated to be held today to further discuss preventive measures against road accidents.

Meanwhile, in a statement, Bangladesh Chhatra Union demanded the minister resign immediately as he "tried to avoid responsibility for Sunday's accident".

In another statement, Janagan-Jukta Front, a platform of politicians, said it rejected the comments made by Shajahan on Sunday.

Protest rages

FROM PAGE 1
Two students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College, Dia Khanam Mim and Abdul Karim Rajib, were killed as the driver of one of the buses ploughed into a crowd near the ramp of the Banani flyover, adjacent to the Armed Forces Medical College in Kurmitola.

Meanwhile, Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners' Association, termed Sunday's crash a murder and demanded the highest punishment for those responsible.

He said their association would investigate the incident. "If any fault on the owner's part is found, the association will take action," Enayet said.

Any transport company owner appointing unskilled drivers without licences should be punished, he added.

ROAD BLOCKED, PEOPLE SUFFER
Several hundred students in uniforms of different schools and colleges gathered near Shewra Bazar around 10:00am and began to march towards the Radisson Blu hotel, chanting slogans and demanding justice for Sunday's victims.

Students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College, Tejgaon Biggan College, BAF Shaheen College, Bhashantek Government College, Kurmitola High School and College, among others, joined the procession.

They blocked both sides of the Airport Road around 10:30am. Some sat on the road while others stopped vehicles in the area.

Around 15 minutes later, they vandalised at least seven buses near Radisson, witnesses said.

The protesters demanded exemplary punishment for the drivers.

They also slammed Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan for trying to make the deaths in road crashes seem insignificant.

"The parents who lost their son and daughter can understand their losses. But how can a minister make fun of the matter? With the minister's indulgence, the bus drivers have become reckless. We want the highest punishment for the bus drivers and demand resignation of the minister," said a student of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College.

One of the students was seen holding a placard that read "[Do] we need 33 bodies for justice?"

The minister on Sunday had mentioned that 33 people had died in a road crash in India.

The protesters urged the government to take responsibility of the road-crash victims and compensate the victim's families.

They also demanded speed-bumps in accident-prone areas and a foot-bridge in front of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College.

Around 2:00pm, the protesters again vandalised at least seven buses on a flyover in the area.

Around 3:15pm, the head teacher of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College went there and requested the students to leave. But the protesters refused to do so.

As police chased them away around 4:00pm, they vandalised around 50 vehicles in Shewra Bazar, Kuratuli and Khikhet areas.

Demonstrators at Science Lab, Mirpur-10 and Pragati Sarani areas vandalised several buses as well.

The nearly six-hour blockade threw Dhaka's traffic into chaos. Scores of people were seen walking as traffic crawled to a halt and stayed like that for hours.

A flight-operations official at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport told The Daily Star that at least seven passengers of three flights scheduled to depart between 4:45pm and 7:30pm called and requested the authorities to delay their flights as they were stuck in traffic.

All except the three scheduled to fly at 7:20pm might have missed their flights as the planes left on time, the official said wishing anonymity.

Rafiqul Islam, a 55-year-old labourer, was coming from Sirajganj to Mohakhali. As the bus didn't go beyond Tongi fearing vandalism, he had to walk for hours in the afternoon to Cantonment Railway Station.

Many including the hajj pilgrims also got stuck in traffic.

Soraiya Malik, 60, missed her flight to Kolkata after being stuck in traffic for three hours in Banani.

"I left my Niketon home at 1:00pm to catch the flight at 5:20pm. After many hurdles I reached at Banani. Not

a single car was moving there. I thought of taking a short-cut through Baridhara, but the situation was the same there," she said.

"I kept waiting but the situation remained unchanged until 4:00pm. Then I decided to return home," she said.

Dhaka Cantonment Railway Station, was besieged by aggrieved students from 2:30pm to 3:30pm, Yasin Faroque, officer-in-charge of Dhaka Railway Police Station, told this newspaper.

Train services resumed after they left, he added.

BRTA SUSPENDS REGISTRATION
The BRTA suspended registration of the two buses, Dhaka Metro Ba-11-7657 and Dhaka Metro Ba-11-9297, for "driving dangerously", Masud Alam, deputy director of the BRTA told The Daily Star, adding that the move was taken as per law.

He said the bus, Ba-11-9297, which ploughed into people had no route permit.

Besides, fitness, route permit and tax token of the other bus had expired, an official said.

"We have written to the bus company [Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan] to appear with all their documents at our office. Further action would be taken after going through the documents," Masud said.

Asked about the allegations, Zakir Hossain, chairman of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan, said he did not know whether the bus had a route permit.

DRIVERS, ASSISTANTS DETAINED
Kabir Hossain Hawlader, inspector (investigation) of Cantonment Police Station, said a victim's father filed a case on Sunday night against an unnamed driver.

Mim's father Jahangir Fakir, however, said, "I was unaware of filing any case, but police took signature on a paper from me before taking my daughter's body from the police station."

"I am not satisfied with the case. I intended to file a murder case for the killing of my daughter."

Rab detained three drivers and two assistants of three buses in separate raids in the capital and Barguna.

They are: Masum Billah, 30, Enayet, 38, Jubair, 36, Sohag, 35, and Ripon, 32.

CEC happy

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the three city polls, and thus we can say the elections were held in a free, fair and credible manner," Quader said.

In a statement, leaders of LDA said the elections were nothing but continuation of government's "absolute rule" that has been established after 2014.

It demanded resignation of the government before the national polls. It also urged it to form a non-partial and acceptable election-time government through discussion.

In another statement, CPB President Mujahidul Islam Selim and General Secretary Shah Alam said through the three city polls, the government made it clear that there was no scope for free and fair election under the incumbent government and the EC.

Three held

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authorities said she never returned after the break, and when her mother, Onumoti Tripura, a farmer, came back home from work in the evening, she noticed that Kirtika wasn't there either. Worried, Onumoti searched almost every house in their village in Noimile area to look for her daughter.

Later at around midnight, some locals spotted Kirtika's body in a nearby forest.

After police recovered the body, it was sent for autopsy. It is believed that she was murdered after being raped.

Kirtika was a fourth grade student of Noimile Tripura Guchhagram Government Primary School.

The brutal incident sparked protest rallies and meetings in Khagrachhari district town, where demonstrators demanded that the murderers and rapists be given exemplary punishment.

Yesterday morning, students of Khagrachhari Government College boycotted classes and took out a procession that gathered in front of the main gate of Khagrachhari District Judge Court. Members of different student organisations participated in the demonstration under the banner of Bangladesh Marma Students Council and Tripura Students and Youth Front.

Leaders of Greater Chittagong Hill Tracts Hill Students Council, Hill Women's Federation, and the Socialist Students' Front spoke in solidarity with the demonstrators.

Elsewhere, many socio-cultural and student organisations like Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad, people from Noimile Guchhagram under the banner of Noimile Guchhagram Residents, Tripura Students' Forum, and Bangladesh Primary Teachers' Association, formed a human chain at Khagrachhari town's Shapla chattr.

They too demanded the immediate arrest of the culprits.

Later, Bangladesh Tripura Kalyan Sangsad went to the Khagrachhari Deputy Commissioner's office to hand over a memorandum to be sent to the prime minister in regard to the incident.

With this, at least five girls have been raped in Khagrachhari in the last three months.

AL, BCL men

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Modinatul Ulum Darussalam Madrasa polling centre while Misbah Uddin from the Bangla daily Prothom Alo was assaulted at Dorga Gate Government Primary School centre.

Meanwhile, police beat up Abdullah Al Bappi, a photojournalist of Daily Naya Diganta, when he tried to take pictures of people casting their votes at Shahjalal Jamia Islamia Qamil Madrasa polling centre.

Several ruling party men attacked Masuk around 11:20am when he was trying to photograph a vehicle bearing the flag of Islami Andolan Bangladesh as it arrived at the polling centre.

Around 80 ruling party activists had gathered there and many among them were seen entering the polling centre.

As Masuk began taking photos, several men wearing AL badges confronted him and snatched his camera, damaging its lenses. Among them, one Mahfuz hit him several times.

The AL men then assaulted Dwoha, the Sylhet correspondent of the English daily, as he tried to take pictures of the attack on Masuk.

They later returned the cameras to both journalists after a ward councillor candidate and an on-duty police officer intervened.

Meanwhile, BCL men allegedly beat up a Prothom Alo journalist Misbah when he entered the centre, our correspondent reports, quoting Ujjal Mehdi, the Prothom Alo Sylhet Bureau chief.

According to our correspondents present at the centre, right before the attack on Misbah, the Sylhet unit AL general secretary and organising secretary, who were visiting the centre, had asked journalists to leave the centre saying that "voting was going on peacefully."

Elsewhere, daily Naya Diganta's Abdullah was beaten up by police as he tried to take pictures of vote casting around 1:45pm in the centre. Police snatched his cameras and returned it after deleting all the photographs.

The centre's Returning Officer Jamil Ahmed declined to make any comment.

PM to open

FROM PAGE 16
had entered the elite Space Club with the launch of its first geostationary communications satellite and now the youngsters of the country could finally dream of working in "rocket science".

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu and the PM's ICT affairs adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy will be present at today's event organised by Posts and Telecommunication Division.

Ten days after launch, Bangabandhu Satellite-1 reached its orbital slot on 119.1 degrees east and it was being fully controlled from the Gazipur station, said Md Mezbahuzzaman, project director of Bangabandhu Satellite-1.

Designed by the French manufacturer Thales Alenia Space, the satellite is equipped with 40 transponders.

The satellite, a Tk-2,765.66 crore project, will offer Direct-to-Home (D2H) services, making people's access to worldwide TV faster and easier.

It will cover mostly South Asian countries, along with Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkestan and a part of Kazakhstan.

Mezbahuzzaman said they had run a network expectation tests with the

help of Thales Alenia Space experts and the result was positive.

"We are expecting the satellite to be ready for commercial use by the end of September."

However, before its commercial launch, the government-owned Bangladesh Communication Satellite Company Ltd (BCSCL), which owns the satellite, will start negotiations with different government agencies and businesses.

The BCSCL has recently written to the finance ministry to request banks to take connection from the satellite.

It has also signed a contract worth about Tk 42 crore per year with the shipping ministry to ensure connectivity for vessels navigating the Bay of Bengal and around the country.

The company is also in negotiation with about seven ministries, including the youth and sports ministry, which are interested in taking support for e-learning.

The BCSCL has also negotiated with the disaster management and relief ministry and the information ministry.

Home and cabinet divisions, along with the establishment ministry, have also expressed their interests in this regard, said a BCSCL official.

Malaysia wants

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in 2009 after it put a freeze on hiring workers following widespread media reports of labour exploitation.

Additional workers were recruited for many name-only Malaysian companies during 2006-09 when private recruiting agents sent works to Malaysia. Workers were charged over Tk 2 lakh each though the government had fixed the migration cost at Tk 84,000 each.

After about four years of freeze, Bangladesh and Malaysia in 2012 signed a G2G deal to reduce migration costs and corruption, but only 10,000 workers could secure jobs in Malaysia under the agreement, thanks to alleged conspiracies of the recruiting agents and brokers.

Under the deal, workers could only have jobs in Malaysia's plantation sector, which raised questions about the sincerity of the authorities.

Following the Andaman boat crisis in 2015, which revealed how Rohingya and Bangladeshis were taking the sea route to Malaysia, the Malaysian government and recruiting agents started saying that the G2G system was not working.

Amid pressure from private recruiting agents, Bangladesh and Malaysia signed the G2G Plus agreement in 2016, but migration experts expressed concern that it would drive up the migration costs.

The scandal involving the G2G Plus surfaced after the political changeover in Malaysia in May this year when the government launched a campaign against the corruption of the previous government's ministers.

According to The Star report, only 10 out of over 1,000 Bangladeshi recruiting agents got the right to hire workers under the G2G Plus arrangement.

Malaysian Minister Kulasegaran

announced suspending the G2G Plus, launching a full investigation into the matter and reviewing the recruitment system with Bangladesh and other countries.

He talked of the policy shift on foreign worker recruitment on Sunday, only days after Nepal barred its workers from going to Malaysia, alleging monopoly by a Malaysian company in recruiting Nepalese workers and charging them higher fees.

The Nepali Times on July 20 reported that a deeply-rooted nexus of politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats in Nepal and Malaysia looted more than Rs 5 billion over the past five years from vulnerable Nepali migrant workers.

Migration expert Anisur Rahman Khan called the new Malaysian government's realisation about the labour recruitment a very welcome development.

"Over the years we have seen how the involvement of private recruiting agents and illegal middlemen resulted in huge corruption and labour exploitation," he told The Daily Star.

Efficient handling of the G2G in cooperation with Bangladesh could bring discipline to the sector, said Anisur director of migration programme at Awaj Foundation, a labour rights body.

He, however, said the lead should come from Malaysia as South Korea did in 2004 when it introduced a state-run mechanism of recruiting foreign workers. It significantly lowered migration costs and improved migrant labour conditions in South Korea.

He demanded Malaysia follow the path of South Korea.

An estimated one million Bangladeshi workers are now working in Malaysia, said Bangladesh High Commission officials in Kuala Lumpur.

Give 2 victims' families

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University of Technology and Engineering to immediately form an expert committee to identify those responsible for the crash and assess the total compensation that should be given to the victims' families.

The expert committee has been asked to submit its assessment report to the HC in two months after receiving the order, writ petitioner Ruhul Quddus Kazal told The Daily Star.

The court ordered the BRTA chairman and the additional commissioner (traffic) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to assist the expert committee to do its task.

An HC bench also issued a rule asking the respondents to explain in four weeks why a directive should not be issued on the owner of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan to give Tk 2 crore as compensation to each of the families of the two students killed on Sunday.

In the rule, the court also asked the respondents to show causes why they should not be ordered to ensure safety and security of the passengers using public transport by controlling reckless driving and strictly enforcing traffic rules.

Home secretary, road transport and bridges secretary, inspector general of police, DMP commissioner, DMP additional commissioner (traffic), the BRTA and Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan are the respondents to the rule.

The bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Khairul Alam came up with the order and rule after hearing the writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Ruhul Quddus.

Earlier in the day, the lawyer submitted the petition as public interest litigation before the HC.

On May 8, the HC, following another writ filed by Ruhul Quddus, had ordered the owners of two buses -- BRTC and Shajan Paribahan -- to pay Tk 1 crore to the family of Government Titumir College student Rajib Hossain, who lost his right hand in an accident

and later died of the injuries.

But, the owners did not pay the compensation following a stay order from the SC.

Following two separate petitions filed by Bangladesh Road and Transport Corporation (BRTC) and Sajjan Paribahan, the court on May 22 stayed the HC order and said an independent committee would submit the assessment report to the HC and then the HC will pass an order on compensation.

The HC on May 30 formed a three-member committee led by Prof Mowazzem Hossain, director of Accident and Research Institute of Buet, to assess the liabilities and compensation issues.

The committee is working, said Ruhul Quddus, adding that the HC was set to pass an order tomorrow on the issue.

Nasa begins

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That technique has already allowed Kepler to find thousands of possible planets, some of which are key candidates for habitability. Tess is expected to find thousands more.

Its work has already begun and it will send its first set of science data back in August. After that it will send down new findings roughly every fortnight, and the science team will scour through it for signs of planets as soon as it arrives.

"I'm thrilled that our planet hunter is ready to start combing the backyard of our solar system for new worlds," said Paul Hertz, Nasa Astrophysics division director at its headquarters in Washington. "With possibly more planets than stars in our universe, I look forward to the strange, fantastic worlds we're bound to discover."

Tess's mission is scheduled to last for two years. But Kepler and other Nasa projects have lasted much longer than those initial projects, so it could be peering through our universe for much longer than that.