

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY

Students reject BCL offer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students involved in the movement for safe roads yesterday turned down Chhatra League's offer for a joint procession to press home their demands. A number of BCL leaders, including its newly selected Dhaka University unit President Sonjit Chandra Sarker and General Secretary Saddam Hossein, offered to bring out the procession with around 1,000 students demonstrating at Shahbagh intersection around 11:30am. The agitating students said if BCL leaders want to protest, they should do it separately.

Badiul's house attacked

A group of unidentified youths attacked the house of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar in the capital's Mohammadpur last night. Badiul said some guests, including US Ambassador Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat, went to his home on Iqbal Road. While the guests were leaving around 11:00pm, the youths, armed with sticks, carried out the attack, he said. The attackers smashed windows and tried to break the main door of the house, he said adding that he had no idea who the youths were. Contacted, Jamal Uddin Mir, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, said he had heard about the incident and later visited the spot.

Demo centring car

Protesters yesterday demonstrated encircling a car apparently of a foreigner as the driver tried to speed away after he was asked to show his licence. Witnesses said a car with yellow number plate was passing Shahbagh intersection around noon when the students stopped it and asked for the driver's licence. The driver did not comply, tried to get away and hit a student in the process. The students then chased the car down in front of BSMMU and demonstrated encircling it. Some of them even got on its roof. Later some policemen of Shahbagh Police Station took the car inside their station.

PBI chief's driver sued

Students halted the SUV of Deputy Inspector General Banaj Kumar Majumdar, chief of Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI), at Science Lab intersection around 10:20am, said witnesses. They found that the licence of his driver had expired. Inspector Sher Ali, who was on duty at the intersection, said the students let the vehicle go 20 minutes later when traffic police filed a case against the driver. The PBI chief was in the car during that time, the officer said.

Ministry cautions Ekattor TV

The information ministry has requested "Ekattor TV not to air programmes, news, and footage that go against the National Broadcast Policy-2014 and could encourage public disorder. The ministry on Thursday issued a notice upon the managing director of Ekattor Media Ltd, parent company of the TV channel. The notice said that the channel aired some footage on August 1 (Wednesday) and August 2 (Thursday) of the student agitation following recent road accidents. This created panic among people. The channel's actions were contradictory to paragraphs 5.1.5, 5.1.6, and 5.1.9 of the National Broadcast Policy-2014, it said. This paper contacted the channel but it declined to comment.



A student with injuries to his eye walks with his fellows. Top right, a boy in a bloodstained shirt looks on. Bottom right, an unexploded crude bomb in front of the gate of Border Guard Bangladesh headquarters. The photos were taken during clashes at Dhanmondi's Jhigatola yesterday afternoon.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN/ PRABIR DAS

BCL in its element

FROM PAGE 1  
The scene changed immediately. The students charged at their attackers, throwing stones. The helmeted attackers turned around and took off. This is how the scene played out on Dhanmondi Road-3 yesterday since the alleged AL men attacked the students who were checking documents of vehicles at Jhigatola as part of their efforts to bring order in the city's chaotic streets. It was the seventh day of their protest demanding improved road safety. The attackers also beat up anybody and everybody who were taking videos on their mobile phones. Eight or nine of them surrounded a lady doctor who was taking video and hit her in the head and leg. A university teacher shielded her and the doctor ran for life. At least 150 people -- students, pedestrians, journalists and ruling party activists -- were wounded. About 20, mostly students and suspected "infiltrators" sustained serious injuries, including in their heads, according to witnesses and our correspondents. At least six of the injured took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, hospital sources said. The alleged ruling party men beat up at least five students who were passing the area in school uniforms, demonstrators or not. They also beat up several others

simply on suspicion that they were Shibir and Chhatra Dal activists. The clash began around 1:30pm when a group of alleged BCL men attacked some students who were checking papers and licences of vehicles, leaving some students injured. The students took their injured peers to nearby hospitals while some others informed their fellow students who were staging protest at Science Lab intersection. Several hundred students, equipped with stones that they picked from an under-construction building, marched towards Jhigatola. The BCL men then chased the students who retaliated by throwing stones. More students joined and, together, they chased the ruling party men up to their party chief Sheikh Hasina's political office at Dhanmondi-3. They threw stones at the party office, shattering glass of the building. No law enforcers were seen for around an hour when chase and counter-chase were going on constantly. The "ruling party men" beat up several students finding them out from the alleys where they took cover. Around 40 policemen with an Armoured Personnel Carrier rushed to the spot around 2:30pm. Together with the alleged ruling party men, the cops took part in chasing the students. As the media men thronged the spot within half an hour, police turned silent. The law enforcers were even more silent spectators when the "BCL men" were beating students and pedestrians and assaulting journalists. Around 3:00pm, some BCB men came out of the Pilkhana gate and took position in the middle of the two fighting groups. They, however, left the place around 15 minutes later as stones continued raining down from both sides. When the students regrouped and marched up to Jhigatola intersection around 2:30pm, seven to eight blank gunshots were fired while the alleged BCL men chased the students, two of our photographers heard.

Around 4:00pm, the students chased their attackers to Jhigatola intersection, but again they were chased back. The chase and counter-chase continued, with the alleged ruling party men kept beating up people on suspicion till 6:00pm. Then the ruling party men took five to six students inside the party office to show them that no one was confined there. Around 30 minutes later, they came out and briefed the students and the media near Shimanto Square (detailed story on page 3). At the briefing, when a student demanded action against the BCL men for the attack, BCL's newly-picked General Secretary Golam Rabbani said they would push for a fair investigation into the incident. Later in the evening, Dhanmondi-3 became a deserted place with marks of destruction as broken tree branches, brickbats and sticks lay on the street. Anxious family members, relatives and friends were rushing to hospitals in search of their loved ones. Some injured protesters were going back home. Around 8:30pm, the ruling party men brought out a rally, chanting slogans while some others were seen patrolling on bikes. Onlookers were standing near the Awami League office. But anyone who took photos or videos were either threatened or beaten up. Maruf Hossain Sarder, deputy commissioner of DMP (Ramna division), said they tried to control the situation with patience. Students also came under attack by police and alleged ruling party men or faced obstructions in several other districts, including Chittagong, Feni and Manikganj. PROTEST RAGES ON Since morning, the students took position at various important points of the capital for the seventh consecutive day, demanding safe roads and justice for their two peers killed in a road crash in the capital on July 29. After the weekend, the students poured onto the streets in their thou-

sands. The demonstrators, mostly students in their mid-teens, chanted "We Want Justice" as they defied rain to take to the streets, bringing city traffic to a standstill. They also controlled traffic, checked licences and fitness certificates as they have been doing for the past six days. Ministers and top police officials have made repeated calls for the students to call off their protests that have paralysed the capital and have now spread outside the capital. Like the previous days, no buses except a few government-run BRTC buses were seen on the streets. More than a thousand students started gathering at Science Laboratory intersection around 10:00am. As the day wore on, more and more students from different educational institutions gathered. Initially, they allowed vehicles to move, but as their number rose they stopped vehicular movement around 11:00am. Only ambulance and vehicles carrying women, children and students were allowed to pass. An hour later, the students observed a minute's silence in memory of Dia Khanam Mim and Abdul Karim Rajib, whose death sparked the unprecedented movement. Then they sang national anthem. Many guardians also joined the protest. "We shall not fail, as we came here with a legitimate demand," said one protester. A female student said, "We believe there will be change. And it seems we will make it happen." Around 12:30pm, the students became furious seeing a security forces' vehicle. Some students were seen climbing up the vehicle and kept jumping on it. Smokes billowed out of the vehicle. Later, the driver showed his licence and other documents and left. Earlier, the students stopped the vehicle of the Chief of Bangladesh Police Bureau of Investigation Banaj Kumar Majumdar at the intersection and found the licence of his driver expired. They let the vehicle go after 20 min-

utes after a traffic police there lodged a case against the driver for violating traffic rules, Inspector Sher Ali said. Around 1,000 students took position at the Aarong intersection on Manik Mia Avenue. They formed a human chain as they chanted slogans. Some of them were seen controlling traffic. Several hundred students of different schools and colleges gathered at Farmgate intersection around 10:00am and made four lanes designated for four kinds of vehicles -- emergency, light vehicles, heavy vehicles and three wheelers -- in order to control the traffic. The students were also seen checking driving licences of the vehicles plying Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue when the report was filed around 10:50am. At Shahbagh intersection, around 1,000 students of different schools and colleges demonstrated for five hours, demanding resignation of Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan and capital punishment for the killers under the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act. Later around 3:30pm, the students held a press conference at the intersection and announced that their protest would continue. "We do not believe in assurances. We will not leave the streets until our demands are met. The government has only accepted our demands, but they are yet to implement those. We want implementation of our demands," said Jobair Hossain Sajal, a student of Dhaka Uddyan Government College. In Mirpur, some 2,000 students took position at various points at Mirpur-1, Mirpur-2, Mirpur-10, Mirpur-13 and Shewrapara. Around 11:30am, some 50 people, many of them wearing helmets, started chasing the students from Mirpur-2 and drove them towards Mirpur-1. But those people took off as several hundred students from Mirpur-10 marched towards Mirpur-2 hearing the news. Students also protested in Savar, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Narayanganj, Moulvibazar and Natore.

Sufferings mount on long routes

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Asked, he said the decision was not a formal one but transport owners across the country have suspended bus services indefinitely as they do not feel their buses would be safe. Queried why they were suspending bus operation on highways when students were agitating in towns and the capital, Enayet said, "Long-route buses have also come under attack." Road safety campaigners have said that whenever there was strong protest against anomalies in the transport sector, bus owners and transport leaders halted their services. It was nothing but a trick to weaken the justified movement of the people, they said. Ashis Kumar Dey, general secretary of National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways, said

whenever any decision or action goes against the interest of the transport owners and workers, they go for "illegal strike, holding people hostage" and embarrass the government. Such "hastily-called strikes", which cause huge public suffering, is illegal, he said. Top leaders of the owners' and workers' platforms are ministers. Such "strikes" called their organisations are tantamount to violation of their oath of office, he said. PUBLIC SUFFERING Hundreds of passengers were stranded at Gabtoli, Mohakhali and Syedabad inter-district bus terminals in the capital yesterday as no long-distance buses left the terminals. At Gabtoli, a huge number of passengers were seen looking for transport. Finding no buses, many of them

rented pickups to reach their destination paying extra. Faruk Hossain, a labourer, along with his wife and two children, had been waiting at Gabtoli since 7:00am yesterday. He had come to the capital from Sylhet the previous night. "My son's right leg broke yesterday and doctors in Sylhet referred him to Dhaka for better treatment. But we decided to take him to Satkhira as one of our relatives who is a doctor works there," he told this newspaper around 3:00pm. "Now, how we will go there," he asked. The situation at the other two inter-district terminals in the capital was the same. In such a situation, Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, in a statement yesterday said they did not call any strike rather, suspended their

services for the security of the owners, workers, passengers and vehicles. The platform also regretted the ongoing public suffering and called on the protesting students to return to classes. Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan is the executive president of the federation. In Chittagong city, people thronged the bus counters in Goribullah Shah Majar area. However, all the ticket counters were closed. Safique Ahmed, a businessman, said he would not be able to attend his business meeting in Gulshan of Dhaka today. Ruhul Amin, president of Bangladesh inter-district road transport workers union, told reporters that they stopped plying vehicles fearing repercussion from the agitating students. He claimed that buses heading for

Feni and Noakhali were leaving Chittagong and bus communication with the hill tracts was normal. Chittagong District Road Transport Owners Group in a press statement said they have suspended transport services for an indefinite period. Similar situation prevailed in other districts, including Sylhet, Dinajpur and Pabna. Meanwhile, the rush of people travelling in trains and launches increased in the last two days. Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan held a meeting with labour leaders at his official residence on Mintu Road last night. The meeting decided that transport workers would run buses if they were given security, said Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation General Secretary Osman Ali, reported Bangla Daily Prothom Alo.

Ball is now in govt's court

FROM PAGE 1  
Soaking in rain, drying up in the sun and defying enforced closure of schools, our children came out on the streets for the seventh consecutive day yesterday. With all the politeness and patience in the world, boys and girls in school uniforms managed the traffic movement, barred drivers without licences or underage drivers and obstructed vehicles on the wrong lane or illegal U-turn. They are not out for jobs. They are just out on the streets for reminding elders to do their jobs right and ensure a safer road for all. They made their points loud and clear. And, their elders who compromise on or patronise this

chaos should find no places to hide their red faces seeing the tiny courageous faces over the week. People are smiling still although they suffered on the roads. Patients were stuck in roads but not complaining. People missed flights yet they smiled. Daily-earners felt the pinch in their pockets but hoped something good would happen. Ministers had to get down from their cars on the wrong side of the road with forced smile on their faces. The deputy inspector general of police embraced the boys after his driver was found without licence. They all walked along with office-goers to go by the traffic rules. So, what's next?

The demands students made are too right yet the method to correct those is wrong. So, this vigilante exercise, no matter how popular it is, has to come to an end. This must not go on any further. If this continues, a good job, like many popular movements of the past, would go out of hands at some point of time. The longer a popular uprising continues, it gets deviated and diluted in the end with the addition of elements of politics and agenda of opportunists. We've seen how the Shahbagh movement for maximum punishment to war criminals and the agitations for quota system reform in government job were derailed and tainted.

The little ones certainly have realised by now what a monster with many heads they're up against. Sooner or later they will put these non-violent children against the government and brand them as enemies of the state. We must protect these precious teenagers. We are very proud of our children for what they did already. Looking at the determined faces, we realise Bangladesh has the biggest hope in these children. And we must not let them fail. We believe Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would see reflections of children of her families in the faces of the children on the streets. Children's cause would be her cause as well.

So, children should go back home now and do what they are supposed to do: study. Let the government take care of the monster in the transport sector. The monster has not grown up in a few years and can't be slayed too overnight. The list of beneficiaries from road irregularities is long. The government should be given time to do the clean-up. And the clean-up should start with the prime minister asking Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader why he failed to keep the sector in order. The ball is now in the government's court.