

Scarred by horrors of hate crimes

Hindu families in Borhanuddin live in fear after zealots burn down 12 houses

SHARIFUL ISLAM, MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, from Bhola

Sattya Prasad Das spent his whole life teaching religious education and humanity to his students, irrespective of religions and caste in his locality in Bhola's Borhanuddin upazila.

In a twist of fate, the former teacher of Borhanuddin High School on Sunday became a victim of inhumane attacks as religious zealots vandalised 12 houses of 11 families, including that of Sattya Prasad's.

They even burned down a house and assaulted the respected teacher, aged 78, with whatever the attackers found around them.

When a violent group of people were marching in processions after the Sunday clash between police and religious bigots that left four killed and over 100 injured, a group of around 100 to 150 of them around 12:00pm entered the locality, which housed 22 Hindu families.

They first vandalised a temple and then attacked the houses which were around 200 yards from Borhanuddin police station.

They broke into the houses by knocking down doors and windows and vandalised furniture, valuables and whatever they found inside.

The devastation of the locals was still evident even 24 hours after the attack.

Sattya Prasad said the group of attackers were throwing brickbats and pieces of wood to break down the doors and windows.

"At one point, four attackers managed to remove a window grill in the back side of the house where my wife, my daughter-in-law and her two children and I took shelter," he said, still shell-shocked from the incident.

"I tried to convince them that we were innocent, but they struck my hand with a piece of wood and threw brickbats towards me," Sattya said, adding that even food was thrown at them.

"In unbearable pain, I could not speak any longer and begged with my hands.

"I have never witnessed such barbarity in my life. I never thought I would ever face such an attack," he said.

While Sattya shared his horrific experience, his wife 65-year-old Anju Rani and eldest daughter Sunanda Rani Das could not hold back tears.

"Many of my father's students are now MPs, upazila chairmen and even respected doctor and engineers. But

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A fisherman displays a hilsa caught from the Surma river in Lamakazi area of Sylhet's Bishwanath upazila. Local fishermen said the fish is rarely found in the river. Inset, some fishermen collecting nets along the banks. The photos were taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Rallying to protect communal harmony

Madrasa students guard a temple against vandalism in Ctg's Hathazari

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, back from Hathazari

Teachers and students of Al-Jamiatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Muinul Islam Madrasa, popularly known as Hathazari Madrasa, saved a temple from vandalism when a group of people started throwing brick chunks at it on Sunday evening.

This initiative of the madrasa, which shares a wall with Shri Shri Sitakali Central Temple, during a demonstration protesting the Bhola incident was praised in the locality and on social media.

Udoy Sen, general secretary of the Shri Shri Sitakali Sebok Samiti, told The Daily Star yesterday that when a procession of over 1,000 people was passing the temple, some of them pelted brick chunks and also tried to enter the temple premises, breaking the main gate.

"At that time, the madrasa students and teachers tried to resist, but failed at first. Later, more madrasa students joined them and formed a human chain to protect the temple," he said.

Farid Uddin, a student of the madrasa, who took part in the

move to save the temple, told this correspondent that Islam does not support attacks on places of worship of other religious communities.

"As a Muslim majority country, it is our religious duty to save the people and establishments of other religious faiths."

He added that the madrasa students were demonstrating peacefully. But a vested quarter might have tried to vandalise the temple to tarnish the image of the madrasa.

Kamrul Islam, a local shopkeeper, said such initiatives of the madrasa students had brightened the image of the madrasa as well as the locality.

If the madrasa students remain alert during any such incident in future, the communal harmony would be greater, he added.

While visiting the temple, this correspondent found that some iron bars of the main gate and two windowpanes at the top of the temple were broken.

According to local sources, the madrasa was established in 1901 and the temple in 1939.

Ctg transport strike spells misery for commuters

Bus owners enforce it in port city to protest imprisonment of 3 workers by mobile court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Thousands of commuters suffered immensely in Chattogram city yesterday as a section of bus owners and workers enforced a sudden strike, protesting the jailing of three of their fellows by a mobile court the day before.

The city-wide strike started in the morning without any official announcement, and particularly affected office-goers, students, and regular commuters in rush hours. It was continuing till filing of this report at 9:30pm last night.

Because of the ensuring transport crisis, commuters had to pay many times over as only rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, and some other three-

wheelers were plying the streets. Inter-district buses, however, were out of the purview of the strike and continued operations, said Md Samsuddin, a traffic inspector of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

Visiting key spots and intersections of the city, this correspondent saw people waiting for buses, most of them unaware that there was a transport strike underway.

Shazedul Islam, a banker, said, "Every day I go to work by bus, from GEC to Shah Amanat Bridge. Due to the strike, I took a CNG auto-rickshaw, which charged me extra."

At Agrabad intersection, undergraduate Rokhsana Rubi was waiting to board a vehicle, but could

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Local admin, cops were ill-prepared

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Biplob maintains his Facebook account had been hacked and used for spreading the hate speech. He was sent to jail in a case filed under the Digital Security Act yesterday.

The small upazila town started to see tension spiral Friday afternoon after the hate speech was sent to some of Biplob's Facebook friends.

On Saturday, some locals, under the banner of "Sarbastorer Muslim Tawhidi Janata" demonstrated and announced a rally at the Eidgah Maidan at 11:00am Sunday.

The locals called off the rally after police told them that legal action would be taken regarding the hate speech.

A schoolteacher, wishing not to be named, said, "The situation had been tense since Friday. Processions were being brought out one after another. But the preparation of the administration and police were inadequate.

"Additional forces could have been mobilised to keep the situation under control," the teacher said.

A shopkeeper in Borhanuddin Bazar area said people were not aware that the rally had been called off. There were elaborate arrangements made for the rally. At least 17 horn speakers were installed Sunday morning.

"What did the local administration and police do?" the shopkeeper said.

Several thousand people gathered demanding capital punishment of Biplob but the number of law enforcers in uniform there was small, the shopkeeper added.

"Such a mayhem could have been averted had the police taken steps realising the gravity of the situation."

A case was filed against 4,000 to 5,000 unidentified people with Borhanuddin Police Station late Sunday night in connection with the clash.

Talking to this paper, Mizanur Rahman, joint member secretary of the Sharbadaliya Muslim Oikya Parishad that tried to hold a rally yesterday, said the situation on Sunday could have been tackled easily by dispersing the crowd with truncheon charge, teargas, and other means.

Mizanur said there was no need for police to open fire.

Asked why they failed to disseminate the news that Sunday's rally was called off, Borhanuddin Police Station Officer-in-Charge M Enamul Haque said it was the imams' [organisers of the rally] job.

"I could not monitor this as I had left the station at 3:30am to rest," he said.

Local lawmaker Ali Azam said police formed a probe committee and the divisional commissioner formed another investigation body. "We will be able to say who had failed after getting these reports."

Barishal divisional range DIG Shafiqul Islam said their probe body would enquire everything regarding the matter.

The home minister yesterday said they were in talks with Facebook to identify the real culprits.

Yesterday, many shops in the upazila town closed until noon and only a handful of vehicles were on the road between Bhola and Char Fasson. Members of Border Guard Bangladesh, Rab, and police were seen patrolling the town.

The situation was still tense. Some locals marched on Kalibari Road and in Sadar Road area in the afternoon. They chanted slogan demanding capital punishment of Biplob.

BIPLOB IN JAIL

A Bhola court yesterday sent Biplob, Rafsan Islam Sharif and Md Emon to jail in a case filed under the Digital Security Act.

On Sunday evening, Borhanuddin Police Station Sub-Inspector Delwar Hossain filed the case against the trio and seven to eight unnamed people for spreading messages demeaning Islam from Biplob's Facebook messenger.

The SI said Biplob had registered a general diary with the police station on Friday stating that his Facebook account was hacked.

As tension mounted, the SI arrested Biplob at his village home in Kachia around 10:00pm Friday and seized his mobile phone. Sharif and Emon were arrested at Patuakhali and Borhanuddin, said the case statement. Sharif's phone was also seized.

Delwar in the case statement said, "As I interrogated the three accused together, it seemed that they along with seven to eight others committed the offence to demean Islam ... So, I arrested them."

OIKYA PARISHAD

Religious group Sharbadaliya Muslim Oikya Parishad yesterday sought permission for a rally protesting Sunday's clash but was denied. The local administration has imposed an indefinite ban on rallies and meetings in the district.

The group placed a six-point demand at a press conference in Bhola Press Club around 11:30am.

The demands included immediate withdrawal of Bhola Superintendent of Police Sarkar Md Kaiser and Borhanuddin Police Station Officer-in-Charge M Enamul Haque; capital punishment of Biplob; compensation for the victims' families; enactment of a law with a provision for capital punishment for demeaning the Prophet (PBUH), Allah, and Islam; and free treatment for all the injured; and

unconditional release of those arrested in connection with the clash.

The parishad held the press conference after Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed and Bhola Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Masud Alam Siddique requested them not to hold any rally and after police denied them permission.

Bashir Uddin, convener of the platform, said they would demonstrate in all upazilas of Bhola today.

They would also form a human chain on Bhola Sadar Road on Thursday and organise a dua mehfil on Friday at Hatkhola Mosque.

Asked why they were demanding punishment of Biplob when his Facebook account had supposedly been hacked and used for spreading the hate speech, the group's joint member secretary Mizanur said whether the account had been hacked was under investigation. "We believe that no Muslim can spread any heinous comments regarding Islam," he said.

HOME BOSS

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said they sought Facebook's help to identify the culprit who made the derogatory comments about Prophet Muhammad (pubh), reports UNB.

"We've sent necessary information to the Singapore office of Facebook and details will be known within two or three days," he said while talking to reporters at the Secretariat.

Mentioning that prima facie evidence suggested that police opened fire on the demonstrators in Bhola in self-defense, he said they were investigating whether there was any negligence on the part of the police and others.

"Whether there's any negligence of duty on the part of police or others is under investigation and legal action will be taken if anyone was found guilty," the minister said.

At one stage on Sunday, some 300 people from the rally tried to break into a room where the UNO, OC and other police officials were at, he said, adding that they heard that the UNO ordered to open fire then.

Asaduzzaman said the probe report would say who actually ordered the firing.

BAN ON RALLIES

Bhola DC Masud said, "We imposed a ban on any kind of meeting and rally in the wake of Sunday's incident. It came into effect this morning [Monday] and will continue until further notice."

The bodies of two persons killed in Sunday's clash were handed over to their families without post mortem, as per the demand of Tawhidi Janata.

He was the victim

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callers wanted to know one thing: why did Biplob say the things he did.

Biplob could hardly respond as he had no idea what had happened. He soon learned of the content of the messages and his shock grew, Ashim claimed.

As panic set in, Biplob went to Borhanuddin police station in the evening and filed a general diary (GD) over his Facebook account being hacked, said Ashim who accompanied him to the station.

Soon after the GD was filed, Biplob's mobile phone started ringing again. When he answered, the caller, impersonating the officer-in-charge of Gazipur police station, demanded Tk 2,000 if Biplob wanted his hacked account to be returned, said M Enamul Haque, the OC of Borhanuddin police station.

The conversation between Biplob and the unidentified caller was automatically recorded on Biplob's cell phone, he added.

Meanwhile, the screenshot of the message sent from Biplob's account had gone viral in the upazila.

Hundreds gathered at the police station after they heard that Biplob was there. The crowd demanded the highest punishment, said the OC, adding that Biplob was kept in custody for safety.

Police immediately tracked the phone caller and arrested one Rafsan Islam Sharif, 18, that night from Patuakhali's Kalapara, the OC said.

Sharif, a neighbor of Biplob, used to work at a power station in Kalapara, one of Sharif's cousins Habiba Akhter Ruma told The Daily Star.

Visiting Sharif's village home at Kaichcha village, these correspondents found the home locked.

Ruma said Sharif's father was at work, while his mother had left home soon after Sharif's arrest.

Police also arrested one Emon in Borhanuddin the same day. He was the one who had sold the mobile phone used to call Sharif, law enforcers said.

At least four people were killed and more than a hundred others injured on Sunday as religious zealots clashed with police in Borhanuddin upazila over the Facebook message.

Meanwhile, Sub-Inspector of the local police station Delwar Hossain filed a case under the Digital Security Act, where Biplob was named as the prime accused. It also accused Rafsan and some unnamed others.

A SIMPLE FELLOW

"Biplob is a very gentle boy. I don't believe he would send such messages. He has been trapped using his Facebook account," said Abdur Razzak, the local union parishad member, who stood vigil throughout the night with other locals and police officials to guard the homes of Biplob and other Hindu families.

Youngest among three brothers and a sister, Biplob was seeking a job after completing his graduation from Abdur Jabbar Degree College in Bhola.

Currently, he was engaged in farm work on his land, said his mother Bashanti Rani Baddya.

Her two other sons now work in Saudi Arabia, while his sister is a homemaker.

Biplob is a very simple and kind-hearted person, who would not write anything to hurt others, said Proddip Kumar Bala, a neighbour of Biplob.

"Biplob's Facebook account was previously hacked around six months ago. Then an unidentified caller demanded taka five hundred to recover the ID," said one of Biplob's friends.

FEAR OF ATTACK LOOMS

Members of some Hindu families in the locality are spending sleepless nights.

Since Friday, none of them have even left their homes, while the younger ones are not going to schools or colleges out of fear.

A police team has been deployed near Biplob's home since Friday evening to ensure safety of the families there.

Cricket rocked by players' strike

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were going to hold a press conference at around 3:00 pm.

The cricketers looked organised as they gathered at the gymnasium, where at least 50 players held a meeting before heading to the Academy Ground.

Shakib clarified that they did not include age-level cricketers due to their ongoing commitments, but did say that the women cricketers, who were not included in the developments because of the rushed nature of the press conference, that they were welcome to join.

"We know that everyone is with us as we raised our demands and until our demands are accepted, we are not willing to partake in any type of cricketing activities," said Shakib to thunderous applause from his fellow cricketers as he finished reading out the demands.

Meanwhile, the BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus expressed disbelief and shock over the cricketers' move, but did say that all the demands were logical and could be negotiated if the cricketers would come to the board before going to the media.

"The press conference where the players put forward their 11-point demand came as a surprise to us. Most of their demands are logical -- with none being such that cannot be met. And most of their demands have or are already being implemented. For instance, their demand for BPL to go back to being a franchise-based league is already being implemented as we already mentioned that this edition of BPL is a special edition [with the tournament being arranged solely by the BCB]. And all their other demands are also negotiable.

"However, this whole 11-point demand came as a surprise and a shock because they never came to us [the BCB] with the demands before; instead they went straight to the media with an ultimatum, which is quite alarming for Bangladesh cricket."

When Shakib was asked why they did not go to the board first the cricketer replied only with a smile. However, another cricketer, on condition of anonymity, said: "Much like we first get to know many important decisions from the board through the media before they discuss with us, we opted to do the same."



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