

55 BNP men injured in police action

STAR REPORT

At least 55 BNP leaders and activists were injured as police baton-charged a procession in Savar and ruling party men attacked another BNP procession in Patuakhali yesterday.

Two police personnel were also injured in a clash in Savar. Police officials in both districts said BNP had not taken permission for the processions.

On February 24, BNP announced an 11-day countrywide programme, including demonstrations, to protest the price hike of daily essentials. There were demonstrations in all 64 districts yesterday.

Patuakhali BNP tried to hold a pre-scheduled rally around 10:30am in front of the district party office on College Road, but eyewitnesses said Awami League men swooped on them before the rally began.

They said the two sides clashed when BNP leaders and activists tried to resist. Police charged baton and lobbed tear gas to bring the situation under control.

District BNP Member-Secretary Snehangshu Sarkar Kutty alleged that at least 25 BNP leaders and activists, including Sadar Upazila BNP President Kazi Mahub and district Chhatra Dal President Shafiul Bashar Ujjwal, were injured in the incident.

Patuakhali district Awami League General Secretary Abdul Mannan denied that AL men were involved, claiming that the clash was due to internal conflict of the BNP.

Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Patuakhali Police Station, said additional police were deployed at different points in the town to avoid further clashes.

In Savar, at least 30 BNP men were injured and three were detained after police baton-charged on a procession.

After a rally at the residence of Dewan Mohammad Salauddin, Dhaka district president of BNP, in Savar's Pakiza area around 11:00am, BNP activists brought out a procession on the Dhaka-Aricha highway.

When it reached Rajalakh Farm area, police barred them. At one stage, the protesters tried to defy the police barricade and police charged baton on them, leaving many protesters injured.

Shariful Alam, Dhaka district BNP's assistant joint-general secretary and former BNP-backed MP Salauddin Babu's personal secretary, told The Daily Star that police suddenly charged baton on their procession leaving 30 leaders and activists injured.

Kazi Moynul Islam, OC of Savar Model Police Station, said BNP men brought out a procession without permission and when police barred them, they hurled brick chips and two police members were injured.

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Young children in Mohammadpur Government Primary School having fun as they return where they belong -- in school playing with their friends. After a closure due to the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, primary schools resumed in-person classes yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Russia keen on funding three rail projects

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

RZD International, a subsidiary of Russian Railways, has expressed interest to finance three proposed railway projects, including the much-talked-about high-speed rail line on the Dhaka-Chattogram corridor.

The company wants to finance and construct the project as well as those entailing the construction of the Panchagarh-Banglabandha rail line and conversion of the Tongi-Bhairab Bazar-Akhaura track into a broad-gauge double line.

The offer was made on Tuesday by the Russian company's local representatives, who met with officials of the railways ministry and Bangladesh Railway at the capital's Rail Bhaban, officials involved with the proceedings told The Daily Star yesterday.

RZD International was advised to come through the Economic Relations Division, which deals with foreign investment-related projects.

The development comes after BR sought Russian funding for five railway projects and placed a formal proposal at the third meeting of the Bangladesh-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Scientific, Economic and Technical Cooperation (BR-IGC) held

in December last year.

However, the high-speed rail is the only project that exists in both the BR and the company's proposals.

If the deal goes through, it would be Russia's first investment in Bangladesh's railways sector. At present, Russia is funding the Rooppur nuclear power plant project.

RUSSIAN PROPOSAL
RZD International's first approach to BR was made in March last year and

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its local representatives held several meetings over the issue and settled on the three projects.

And last month, Vladimir A Finov, the head of RZD International's representative office in India, wrote a letter to Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon.

Meinhardt Singapore and MGI Capital, the transaction advisory wing of Meinhardt Group, will work as RZD's associates in implementing the projects, according to the letter.

THREE PROJECTS

BR has already completed the feasibility study and detailed design of the high-speed railway project.

The estimated cost of the 224.64-kilometre-long rail route is \$11.1 billion (Tk 93,350.9 crore).

However, Sujon last year said the government would go slow in implementing the project as it would require huge investment.

BR is now carrying out the feasibility study for constructing a 48-km road between Panchagarh and Banglabandha Land Port, expected to boost regional connectivity.

As per the draft study report, the cost of the project would be about Tk 3,200 crore, sources said.

The existing line from Tongi via Bhairab to Akhaura is a metre-gauge double line and BR has already carried out a feasibility study to turn it into a dual-gauge line aiming to increase the capacity of the Dhaka-Chattogram rail corridor.

BR's Director-General Dharendra Nath Mazumder could not be reached over the phone, while Habibur Rahman, additional secretary of railways ministry, who led the ministry in absence of rail secretary at the meeting, declined to comment on the matter.

Woman raped with husband, children tied up at home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A group of criminals raped a woman tying up her husband and children at her home in Bagerhat's Morrelganj upazila early yesterday.

According to the victim's husband, the criminals intruded into their house with lethal weapons around 4:00am yesterday.

"They first blindfolded and tied us up and then raped my wife and looted our belongings," he said.

They looted around two tolas of gold ornaments, Tk 5,500 in cash and a mobile phone.

Police sent the rape victim to Bagerhat Sadar Hospital for medical tests yesterday afternoon, and said they were preparing a case.

Prosecution concludes argument in Destiny money laundering case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution concluded arguments in a money laundering case against Destiny Group Managing Director Rafiqul Amin and 45 others yesterday.

ACC Public Prosecutor Mir Ahmed Ali Salam told the court that they undoubtedly proved the charges against Rafiqul Amin and others and demanded highest punishment for their offences.

Judge Shaikh Nazmul Alam of the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka heard arguments and fixed today for arguments on behalf of Rafiqul Amin and others.

Court issues arrest warrant against Rizvi, 3 others

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued arrest warrants against BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed and three others in two cases filed over attacking policemen and vandalising vehicles in December 2019.

Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Metropolitan Special Tribunal-1 of Dhaka issued the arrest warrant against Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed, Mohammad Shahin, Delwar Hossain and Mohammad Rana.

The tribunal directed officer-in-charge of Hatirjheel Police Station to submit by May 19 the reports on implementation of the arrest warrants issued against them.

Police yet to arrest 2 involved in Bhairab factory worker's rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police are yet to arrest the two accused involved in a rape incident in Kishoreganj's Bhairab upazila on Monday.

The victim, a plastic factory worker in Bhairab, lodged a case accusing Shafiqul Islam, 38, and his cohort Abdul Hossain, 35, said police.

Contacted, Golam Mostafa, officer-in-charge of Bhairab Police Station, said soon after the incident, the accused fled the area.

Police are conducting drives to arrest them, he added.

Odyssey out of Kharkiv

FROM PAGE 1

The journey was bound to be risky. How does one cross a thousand kilometres in a country at war?

With an aim to head towards Lviv – a border city – they somehow made it to the railway station.

"As we queued outside to enter the station, the shelling began again and everybody made a mad dash towards the underground bunker."

With blasts just metres away, the crowds turned into a stampede. "I honestly thought we would get stomped to death," she said.

At least six Bangladeshis waited together on the rail platform but only four, including Fabiha, managed to board the train.

The others were first-year medical student Samiha, and second-year medical students Shifa and Yasser. The rest were forced to stay back at the station, unable to leave Kharkiv.

"The train could not hold the amount of people looking for a way out. But the authorities tried to ensure that people of all nationalities were able to board."

The 19-hour-long train journey was another endless nightmare.

"All the lights were switched off and the rail authorities told us not to have our GPS location or wifi on. Around us, there was a rain of missiles. Russian fighter jets are capable of detecting



FABIHA



SAMIHA



SHIFA



YASER

congregations of people and targeting their missiles accordingly. If we had our signals turned on, they would be able to locate the train," she explained.

Meanwhile, the authorities repeatedly urged all passengers to keep their window shut.

During a pit stop, everyone notices how the capital of Ukraine – Kyiv – had been ground to dust from attacks earlier in the day.

"The train usually

stops at this city for an hour. But this time, it was only for around 15 minutes. But even those few minutes seemed never-ending," said Fabiha.

With fear at their throats, the four Bangladeshis counted seconds till they could leave the frightful city of Kyiv.

The shelling started to thin out the further they moved from Kyiv. After they landed in the city of Lviv, the next part of the journey was on foot.

The four friends walked for six hours in the freezing cold to reach the Poland border. Ukrainian nationals living on the road helped the tired travellers with food and water.

"When we reached the border, we realised to our dismay that there were no Bangladeshi embassy officials," said Fabiha. Unable to contact any official, they took shelter in a school.

"Food comprised of a small amount of rice and vegetables, while we each got a thin blanket to beat the cold. Steaming hot tea and biscuits flowed aplenty."

They spent two nights at this shelter before crossing the border on February 28.

Once inside Poland, Egyptian embassy officials allowed the Bangladeshis to board their Warsaw-bound bus.

The four friends were, at last, safe. But they had their thoughts and worries with those they had to leave behind.

Soybean oil

FROM PAGE 1
discovered that a group of traders was selling loose oil taking it from sealed containers to make more profit.

They cannot manipulate the bottled oil prices as the prices are printed on the label, he said, warning them of stern actions.

The minister did not name the traders and companies found involved in price manipulation.

He said the government would not increase the edible oil price now and it would not allow sales of loose soybean oil in the country after May 31. For palm oil, the deadline is December 31.

Tipu said it was impossible to control quality and price of edible oil when it is sold in loose form.

Ghulam Rahman, president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), said businesses are always opportunists.

"As the war has created concerns about prices and supply chain disruption, a section of traders is exploiting this."

"Commodities that are in the local market have been imported earlier and prices hike at this moment is unacceptable and unethical," he said.

Invasion intensifies

FROM PAGE 1

against Russia.

The UN said 836,000 people have fled since the conflict began seven days ago, including many students and migrant workers from Africa and the Middle East who had been living in Ukraine.

"We left everything there as they came and ruined our lives," said Svitlana Mostepanenko, a refugee registering in Prague.

In his first State of the Union address on Tuesday night, US President Joe Biden warned the sanctions campaign to cripple Russia's economy would escalate and its oligarchs were being targeted, reports AFP.

Russian troops rolled into Ukraine last week to achieve Putin's mission of overthrowing Zelensky's government and "denazifying" the pro-Western country.

But Ukrainian troops have fought back hard and prevented Russia from capturing the country's biggest cities.

Russian defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said

the deteriorating situation in Ukraine. It wanted to reach international waters fast but delay in getting clearance from the port made it impossible as all port operations were halted after Russia sent its troops into Ukraine.

There were food and water on the ship for at least 40 days.

Bangladeshi dies

FROM PAGE 1

Banglar Samridhi had 29 crew members, all Bangladeshis.

The 180-metre-long bulk carrier left Turkish port Ereğli on February 21 and reached the outer anchorage of Olvia.

After reaching the port, the ship cancelled its plans for loading the cargo due to

Strike disrupts work of dist, upazila admin

FROM PAGE 1

They threatened to continue demonstrations throughout this month unless the government changes their designation and upgrades their salary grade to 13 from 14 and 15.

About 12,500 staffers are staging the protest, said the association.

Officials said the protests were badly hampering administrative works.

"If the work abstention continues, activities at our offices will eventually come to a halt," a UNO in Dhaka division told The Daily Star, wishing not to be unnamed.

Kazi Moniruzzaman, secretary general of the staffers' association, said they have long been pressing for the demands, but to no avail.

He said office assistants join work under Grade-16 of the National Pay Scale-2015,

but only a few of them are promoted to Grade-10, which is equivalent to the salary scale of a second-class officer. This creates frustration among the staffers.

There are 20 grades under the National Pay Scale-2015. These grades are divided into four categories – 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th. Grades 1 to 9 fall under the 1st category, Grade-10 under the 2nd, Grade-11 to 16 under the 3rd and the rest under the 4th category.

Moniruzzaman said there is a discrepancy in the salary scales of 'tahsildar' and the staffers of the administrative section of the land offices, which irked them.

In January, the land ministry upgraded the salary scale of union land assistant officer (tahsildar) and union deputy land assistant officer (assistant

tahsildar) to Grades 11 and 12 from 16 and 17.

"Following the upgradation, a junior staffer becomes a senior in the same office [AC land]. The former senior staffers [in Grades 14 and 15] now have to call their juniors 'sir'. This is humiliating," said Moniruzzaman.

The association now demands a merger of Grades 14 and 15 with Grade 13 and the designation of the staffers be "administrative officer" and "assistant administrative officer".

On Tuesday, Dhaka Deputy Commissioner Shahidul Islam wrote to the senior secretary of the public administration ministry, informing it about the commotion among the staffers.

This newspaper has obtained a copy of the letter.

It says, "Though the staffers of different departments under the same pay grades have been promoted, those working at the district administration are yet to be promoted. They are working at the same level, but they are being paid under a lower grade."

"Due to the work abstention throughout the day, public service is being badly disrupted and a deadlock has been created."

The DC recommended upgrading their pay grades and changing their designations.

Speaking to this correspondent, another UNO said there are many public events in March and the strike was hampering preparations.

"Besides, haats and bazars are leased out this time of the year ahead of the Bengali New Year's Day [April 14].