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NARAIL MAYHEM

'They attacked us because we are Hindus'

Locals leave homes after second attack in a month

DIPANKAR ROY

Deepali Rani Saha can never forget this Friday night when she watched her house burn down.

"After one group looted all our valuables, another group came and found our door open. As there was nothing left to loot, they set our home on fire."

While the looters attacked, the 62-year-old was hiding under the bed in a shed adjacent to the house with her son Gobinda.

"They could not break in [where we were hiding] as it was locked. They then attacked the temple next door and vandalised the idol."

Deepali's was among the three homes and dozens of shops that were vandalised or burnt down in Sahapara village in Dighalia union of Narail's Lohagara upazila.

The attacks were carried out by mobs protesting a Facebook post that reportedly hurt religious sentiments.

Locals alleged the post was made by Akash Saha, an 18-year-old college student of the village.

They gathered after Juma prayers and protested in front of the student's house, demanding his arrest.

As he was missing, the mobs spread to neighbouring Hindu homes -- homes of people who had nothing to do with the Facebook post.

In the evening, the police detained Akash's father Ashoke Saha to "bring the situation under control", while they prepared to file a case under the Digital Security Act against Akash.

None of the attackers, however, have been arrested yet.

Yesterday morning, Deepali stood embracing her eight-month-old granddaughter Rai Saha in front of the charred remains of their home.

She pointed out how even little Rai's possessions were not spared.

"Only because the student is Hindu and I [too] am Hindu, my house was burnt down."

"I don't know how long this threat of violence will haunt us. Who will give us justice? Who will give us security? ... If I were in the house while they set it on fire, I would have died. God saved me. But is this any way to survive? All I have now is the sari on my body."

Many people from the administration have been coming since yesterday morning and giving assurances of safety, but she is unconvinced.

"I am not asking for money; I am not asking for help. I am seeking answers -- why was my house set on fire?"

Her son Gobinda, a betel leaf trader, sat on yard sobbing on the phone, with relatives calling from abroad, as he listed all they had lost.

His wife Chandra Saha was not home the night of the attack. When she returned yesterday, she stood shell-shocked in front of the carnage.

"I don't want to stay here with my children. I don't want to be a victim," she said.

Police have deployed additional forces to ensure security, but locals still feel unsafe.

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A shell-shocked Deepali Rani sitting at the doorstep of her house, which was set on fire during Friday's communal attack on properties owned by Hindu people in Sahapara area of Lohagara, Narail. The mobs went on a rampage after Juma prayers, saying that an 18-year-old man from the neighbourhood hurt their religious feelings on Facebook. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

PMO steps in to find ways to ease tailback

Meeting today over gridlock at toll plazas of Padma Bridge, expressway, Hanif flyover

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

There was a fear that opening the Padma Bridge may worsen gridlocks at the entrance to the capital's south due to a lack of planning to dealing with additional traffic.

And the fear of experts, road users and even officials, has now been justified as the entrance to Jatrabari has been witnessing regular traffic congestions since late last month. The situation was grave particularly during the Eid rush.

Meanwhile, manual toll collection at the newly opened bridge and the Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway added to the snarl-ups when the pressure of vehicles increased, leading to the suffering of tens of thousands of passengers.

Amid such a situation, the Prime Minister's Office has called a meeting today to come up with solutions to traffic congestions at the Mayor Mohammad Hanif Flyover and the toll plazas of the expressway and bridge.

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Road crashes claim 29 lives in a day

Dozens hurt in 10 dists; woman, her 2 children among the dead

STAR REPORT

It was a deadly day on the roads yesterday as at least 29 people were killed and more than two dozens injured in crashes in 10 districts.

Of the victims, a woman and her two children died after being run over by a bus near Pakulla bus station in Tangail's Mirzapur upazila.

The dead were identified as Parvin Akter, 26, a resident of Bashtoil village in Mirzapur, her son Sumon, 10, and daughter Sadiya, 8.

The victims' family members Parvin along with her children were returning home yesterday morning after celebrating Eid-ul-Azha with her father at a nearby village.

A bus ran them over while the three were crossing Dhaka-Tangail highway in Pakulla bus station area, leaving Sadiya

dead on the spot.

Critically injured Parvin and Sumon were taken to Tangail General Hospital where a doctor declared them dead, said Monsur Mucha, assistant superintendent of Tangail police.

Another accident in Mirzapur upazila's Dulla Monsur area claimed four lives and left nine others injured. The crash occurred around 4:30am when a Dhaka-bound bus hit a sand-laden stationary truck, said police.

The deceased were identified as bus passengers Alok Kumar Roy of Rangpur's Pirganj, Jakaria Islam of Barishal, Moazzem Hossain of Mymensingh's Fulbaria, and Shakhawat Hossain, helper of the bus driver.

In Mymensingh, three family members, including a pregnant woman, died after a truck ran them over in Trishal

upazila in the afternoon.

The victims -- Jahangir Alam, 42, his wife Ratna begum, 26, and their three-year-old daughter Sanjida -- were from Roymoni village in the same upazila.

A neighbour of the victims said the three were travelling to the upazila town from their village for medical examinations of Ratna. Around 2:00pm, they were standing along a road to cross it.

All of a sudden, an onion-laden truck ran them over, leaving the father and daughter dead on the spot.

Critically injured Ratna gave birth to a baby girl before breathing her last there, said Mohammad Mainuddin Jahangir, OC of Trishal Police Station.

In Sirajganj, four people were killed and five others injured when a bus collided head-on with two trucks in Khalkula area of Tarash upazila.

The dead were identified as bus passengers Abdul Aziz, 46, of Bagha, Rajshahi, Mirazul Islam, 32, of Ishwardi, Pabna, and Raihanur Rahman, 35, of Gazipur and Masud Hossain, 33, a truck driver from Natore.

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Miracle baby
Dying mother gives birth at the scene of accident



AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

The birth of a baby is among the happiest moments in a parent's life. But for Ratna Begum, her happiness was short-lived: she died soon after.

She was headed to the diagnostic centre for her routine pregnancy check-up when an onion-laden truck hit them while at the Court Building area of Trishal upazila of Mymensingh yesterday afternoon.

Her husband, Jahangir Alam, and her daughter Sanjida died on the spot. But the 26-year-old survived long enough to give birth to a girl, said Mohammad Mainuddin, the officer-in-charge of Trishal Police

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Locals block Dhaka-Tangail highway in Pakulla area of Mirzapur, Tangail, after a woman and two children got crushed to death by a bus around 11:40am yesterday. Residents of the area said they have long been demanding an underpass for people to safely go across the busy road. PHOTO: STAR

MP beat me up and it was all planned

Rajshahi principal heard saying in audio clip, says the same to NU probe panel: sources

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

College Principal Salim Reza admitted to a probe committee that he was indeed assaulted by Rajshahi lawmaker Omor Faruk Chowdhury at the latter's chamber more than a week ago, according to two individuals who were present when Salim was talking to the committee members.

Salim, principal of Rajbari Degree College in Godagari upazila, termed the assault a "planned" one when he was interviewed by the three-member committee on Friday morning, the sources told The Daily Star.

During the interview at Salim's home in Rajshahi, the committee members headed by National University (NU) Registrar Molla Mahfuz Al-Hossain talked to the principal alone and also in presence of his family members and relatives.

However, the committee members did not talk to reporters about the findings.

NU Human Resources Director Jayanta Bhattacharjee, a member of the committee, said, "We are committed to finding the truth."

The probe body was formed on Wednesday amid reports that MP Omor assaulted Salim at his office on July 7.

The next day, the lawmaker held a press conference

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