

LAND DISPUTE

Attempt to carry out attack on indigenous people foiled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogura*

Several hundred Bangalees in Bogura's Sherpur upazila yesterday attempted to carry out an attack on indigenous people following a land dispute.

However, the attempt was foiled by police.

Locals said there has been a rivalry between indigenous Turi, Singh, Mahato and Barmon communities and Bangalees over a piece of land in Amboil village.

The indigenous people claim the land belongs to them while the local Bangalees deny it.

On Sunday morning, the two sides got locked into a clash that left at least 30 people injured.

Later on Tuesday, Sherpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sanjida Sultana arranged an arbitration at her office, directing all to refrain from violence and settle the matter through discussion.

But several hundreds of Bangalees yesterday morning gathered in Amboil village with bamboo sticks around 11:30am yesterday. Others from neighbouring Balenda and Gorta Uttar Para villages also joined them, said witnesses.

"They were urging people through loudspeakers of mosques to gather and carry out an attack on us," said Santosh Singh Babu, an indigenous community member.

"They are trying to forcibly occupy our land by spreading communal hatred," said Santosh, also president of Bogura District Adivasi Parishad.

He also alleged that Bangalees beat up two indigenous youths, Sujan Singh, 25, and Ujjal Singh, 32, yesterday morning.

However, local Bangalees denied the allegations and said the indigenous people first beat up a Bangalee youth triggering the chaos.

"They [indigenous people] first beat up one of our men, who is physically-challenged, this [yesterday] morning. His name is Faruk. Even, they were preparing to attack on us. In retaliation, we gathered to resist their attack," said Sujan Miah, 30, a resident of Amboil.

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PHOTO: AFP

Local people stand in the remains of a fireworks warehouse destroyed after Russian strike in Kharkiv, Ukraine, yesterday.

Fate of Ukraine's Soledar hangs in the balance

Russian mercenary group claims to control the gateway town; Kyiv says its forces holding on amid bitter fighting

AGENCIES

Russian and Ukrainian forces were engaged in intense fighting yesterday over the town of Soledar in eastern Ukraine -- a stepping stone in Moscow's push to capture the entire Donbas region -- with the Russians appearing to have the upper hand.

The mercenary group Wagner, which has spearheaded the assault, on Tuesday claimed to have taken control of the small salt-mining town but said pockets of Ukrainian resistance were holding out in the centre.

Russia's defence ministry said yesterday that airborne units had cut off Soledar from the north and south. But Ukraine's military denied that Soledar had fallen and said its defensive lines had not been

breached.

"Heavy fighting continues in Soledar," Ukraine's deputy defence minister Hanna Maliar wrote on Telegram yesterday.

"The enemy has again replaced its units after sustaining losses, has increased the number of Wagner (Russian mercenaries) and is trying to burst through our forces' defence and fully seize the city, but is not having success."

The Kremlin also stopped short of claiming victory and acknowledged suffering heavy casualties.

"Let's not rush, let's wait for official statements. There is a positive dynamic in progress," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked about the situation on the ground.

A Reuters photographer who has reached the outskirts in recent days said many residents had fled along roads out of the town in perishing cold. She said plumes of smoke could be seen rising over the town and the incoming artillery fire was relentless.

A victory in Soledar, which had a pre-war population of around 10,000, would have symbolic, military and commercial value for Moscow after battlefield setbacks in recent months.

Elsewhere, the head of the Kherson military administration in southern Ukraine told a news briefing that Russian forces were keeping up their shelling of the provincial capital, which they vacated in November.

Bilateral ties

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Dhaka, Haas's December 14 meeting at the home of a missing BNP leader in the capital's Shaheenbagh was interrupted by members of Mayer Kanna, who had gathered outside the house.

Mayer Kanna is a platform launched by the families of those who fell victim to court martial during President Ziaur Rahman's regime.

Lu's visit comes less than a week after the visit of Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher, senior director for South Asia at the US National Security Council. More US officials are likely to visit Dhaka later this month and the next.

Foreign policy analysts said the US is increasing its engagement with Bangladesh not only to press for free and fair elections, human rights and labour rights, but also for drawing the country on its side under its Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Also, the US considers Bangladesh a potential market as its economy is expanding rapidly, and a strategic partner because of its importance regarding maritime access.

Foreign ministry officials further said Bangladesh would request the US official to withdraw the sanctions his country imposed on the Rab and its officials in December 2021 for alleged human rights violations.

Dhaka will also seek to have the GSP facility on Bangladesh's export to the US, which suspended the duty-free facility following the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster.

According to the State Department statement, in India Donald Lu will participate in the India-US Forum and also meet senior Indian officials to discuss ways in which the US and India can further expand energy, trade, security, and human rights cooperation.

Govt to import

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Of the quantity, Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) will buy 30,000 tonnes of granular urea at Tk 150 crore from the UAE under a state-to-state contract.

The fertiliser will be purchased at \$470 a tonne, \$10 less than the rate the government had paid the company on its previous purchase.

Besides, the government will buy 30,000 tonnes of urea at around Tk 150 crore from Saudi Arabia. The cost of urea will be \$470 per tonne, which was \$551 per tonne previously.

Moreover, the cabinet committee approved the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh's proposal to import 12,500 tonnes of sugar from Kolkata-based Srinova Ispat at Tk 70.2 crore.

Year's first demo mostly peaceful

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"The Awami League is in power thanks to police and bureaucrats ... They are isolated from the people," Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the party, said at the sit-in at Nayapaltan.

As part of the simultaneous programme led by the BNP, Ganatantra Mancha held a similar programme in front of the Jatiya Press Club, while 12 Party Alliance held one at Bijoy Nagar, Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote at Purana Paltan, LDP in front of FDC, Ganatantrik Bam Oikya at the east end of Jatiya Press Club, and Gonoforum (Montu) at Arambagh.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami did not join.

The south lane between Fakirapool and Nightingale intersection was off-limits to traffic as BNP activists swarmed the area. A large number of police personnel were present there with armoured vehicles and water cannons.

Speaking as the chief guest at the Nayapaltan sit-in, Fakhrul alleged that the ruling party activists and law enforcers attacked their peaceful sit-in in Faridpur.

He also called upon people from all walks of life to join their movement to force the "autocratic" government to quit, paving the way for a pro-people government and parliament through an acceptable election.

"Let us move towards that goal. We have to march forward uniting the people to restore our voting rights and democracy. Signs are there that noted citizens of the country are also coming forward," he said.

Project on cards to build chord line

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In 2012, the railways ministry even sent a proposal for constructing the line under a public-private partnership. But this did not see much progress due to unknown reasons, the BR officials said.

Asked about the delay, BR Director General Quamrul Ahsan said since it would be a new line, it would require a huge amount of land and money for implementation.

"This caused the delay. But ADB has shown interest in investing in the project, so we are now hopeful of implementing it," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

In June 2020, the government approved the Tk 235.37 crore Technical Assistance Project, with the Asian Development Bank providing Tk 167.14 as a loan for feasibility study and detailed design of the 11 projects.

Apart from the chord line, the consulting firm will carry out the feasibility study and detailed design

Fakhrul then announced the programme for January 16.

He said the programme would be observed in cities, districts towns, upazilas, and municipality headquarters.

"People of Bangladesh have woken up," he said.

He claimed that 600 BNP leaders and activists were in Keraniganj jail enduring unbearable sufferings. "One of our activists was killed here [Nayapaltan] on December 7. So far, 15 of our activists have been killed."

BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, who chaired the programme, said the government used to say that the BNP announces programmes to create chaos, but the BNP arranged 10 rallies and subsequently held other programmes peacefully.

"We will also hold all our programmes in the days to come in the same way, together with the people to oust the government," he said thanking the party leaders and activists.

BNP standing committee member Mirza Abbas said the government must go as the people have woken up.

"We don't want to remove this regime. We want to ensure that it falls through a credible election under a caretaker government," he said.

In Faridpur, the sit-in began at Ambika Maidan around 11:00am as per schedule and eyewitnesses said motorbike processions of Chhatra League and Jubo League men went passed the venue around 12:15pm.

The Chhatra League and Jubo League men were carrying sticks, and

at some point, a cocktail exploded at the entrance to the venue.

The BNP men chased the Chhatra League and Jubo League men away and hurled brick chunks and sticks.

Witnesses said the BNP men then started throwing brick chips at policemen stationed on the east end of the ground. The police retaliated with rubber bullets.

Around 12:25pm, police stopped a BNP procession near the Government Rajendra College and the BNP men threw brick chunks at the police.

The police dispersed the procession. BNP central leaders then rushed to the Ambika Maidan for safety but their programme was foiled.

The situation came under control around 1:00pm.

At a press briefing later on, BNP Vice-Chairman Ahmed Azam Khan alleged that the programme was peaceful until 12:30pm "when the supporters of the ruling party men attacked, and BNP leaders and activists resisted them. Later, members of the ruling party joined the police and fired indiscriminately on BNP leaders and workers. Many BNP members were injured."

Shamim Haque, president of Faridpur Awami League, said, "No one from the Awami League obstructed any programme of the BNP."

Suman Ranjan Sarkar, additional superintendent of police (Sadar Circle), said the BNP was not supposed to bring out any procession. "But they brought out a procession and attacked police personnel. Police fired rubber bullets for safety."

Get rid of 'caretaker ghost'

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city and other divisional headquarters to press home their 10-point demand that includes the national election under a non-partisan interim government.

The AL Dhaka city south unit organised the rally at its central office marking the homecoming day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but party insiders said it was part of a strategy.

The BNP's divisional rally in Dhaka on December 10 was "not a huge success" as the Awami League leaders and activists occupied the streets, added the insiders.

Keeping this in mind, the AL has chalked out strategies to keep the BNP under pressure and stay on the streets -- whenever the opposition party comes up with programmes, an AL presidium member told this

Lawyers' boycott

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in Narsingdi, told this correspondent yesterday that a land-related case of his was pending with the court. As the verdict of the case was scheduled to be delivered on January 5, he had to go to Brahmanbaria from Narsingdi.

He said he was not getting compensation for land acquisition by the government because the case was still pending.

Nurul Islam, of Madhberbagh village of Bijoynagar upazila, said his son is accused in a case filed under the Women and Children Repression

newspaper, seeking anonymity.

Apart from the scheduled programmes, the ruling party men took positions and remained vigilant across the city.

Addressing the Mirpur rally arranged by the party's Dhaka north city unit, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader urged the BNP to get rid of the ghost of the caretaker government demand.

"Sheikh Hasina will remain the Prime Minister during the election period. The government will not interfere in the polls," he added.

He also said if the BNP assumes power again, the spirit of the Liberation War will be destroyed.

Speaking at the rally, AL Joint General Secretary Hasan Mahmud said BNP will fail again like on December 10 if it tries to oust the government.

Prevention Act.

He added that hearing of a bail plea was slated for January 4, but a week has gone by and no hearing has been held.

Contacted, Tanbir Bhuiyan, president of Brahmanbaria District Bar Association, said the boycott will continue until their demand for withdrawal of two judges and a court employee is met.

The boycott is hampering the proceedings of 2,500 to 3,000 civil and criminal cases in the district, said court sources.

Bodies of 2 Rohingyas recovered from Naf river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

Police have recovered the bodies of two Rohingya nationals from the Naf river in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar.

The bodies were recovered from the estuary of the river at Jadimura in Teknaf's Hnila at 3:30pm yesterday, Md Abdul Halim, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, told The Daily Star.

The deceased, Abdus Salam, 38, and his brother-in-law Shafiullah, 28, were residents of a Rohingya refugee camp at Nayapara in Hnila.

They were accused in robbery and drug peddling cases, the OC added.

Fish trader shot dead in Jashore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Benapole*

A fish trader was shot dead by unidentified criminals in Jashore's Abhaynagar upazila around 8:00am yesterday.

Two men shot Subrata Mondal, 45, near Damukhali Primary School and fled the scene on a motorcycle, said police, quoting locals.

He might have been killed by "extremists", said AK Shamim, officer-in-charge of Abhaynagar Police Station.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Jashore General Hospital morgue for autopsy, he added.

The reason behind the murder could not be known immediately, the OC said.

TRAWLER CAPSIZE IN BALESHWARI

Bodies of 2 missing fishermen found

STAR REPORT

The bodies of two fishermen, whose trawler sank in the Baleshwari river in Barguna's Patharghata on January 3, have been found.

Five days after the trawler capsized, the body of Bayezid, 17, was recovered on Tuesday evening. The body of Yusuf, 23, was recovered around 9:00am yesterday, Sanjay Majumdar, officer-in-charge of Patharghata Police Station, confirmed.

According to family sources, Yusuf and Bayezid took a small trawler for fishing on January 3 with four days of food in stock.

Yusuf and Bayezid went missing after the trawler sank in Pakkidia Lachi area of the Sundarbans, 30km southwest of Patharghata.

Barguna District Trawler Owners Association General Secretary Masum Akon said, "The fishermen were cousins."

Five trawlers had been searching the river to rescue them, he added.

Deputy MD

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It includes a trip to the Padma rail and a ride in Dhaka's metro rail -- the two mega infrastructure projects that were inaugurated in 2022.

She will also witness first hand the dynamism in Bangladesh's famed garment sector, the second-largest manufacturer of apparel in the world, when she visits an industrial unit.

Sayeh, who was previously the finance minister of post-conflict Liberia, will also get an experience of Bangladesh's much-talked-about demographic dividend: she will visit the University of Dhaka and hold a session there.

During the visit, which wraps up on January 18, she will meet with the prime minister, the speaker, the finance minister and the Bangladesh Bank governor to discuss the economic challenges facing

Bangladesh and the ways the IMF could help the authorities to deal with them and support their efforts to foster strong, inclusive and green growth.

She will also engage with women leaders and university students.

This will give her a fair idea to accurately present Bangladesh's case before the IMF executive board, which is expected to convene later this month to take a call on Bangladesh's loan proposal.

Bangladesh has agreed to as many as 30 conditions, including some key structural reforms stalled for years.

If the board approves the loan application, the first instalment of \$447.8 million would be released in February. It will be followed by six equal instalments of \$659.18 million subject to fulfilling the timebound reform measures laid out in the loan proposal.