

TORCHING OF HOMES IN ABHAYNAGAR

Men flee village, women in trauma

No arrest, no case filed even after 4 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Despite the presence of law enforcers, almost all male residents of Dahor Moshiahathi in Jashore's Abhaynagar upazila have gone into hiding after a mob looted and torched their homes following the murder of a local Krishak Dal leader.

Women do not stay in their charred homes at night, fearing more attacks.

On Thursday evening, Tariquul Islam, 50, president of the Krishak Dal in Nawapara municipality and a resident of nearby Dhopadi village, was hacked and shot dead at a house in Dahor Moshiahathi. His family claims he was lured out and killed over a dispute regarding a shrimp enclosure lease.

Later that night, according to locals and victims, a mob stormed the village and looted, vandalised, and set fire to at least 18 houses of the Matua community. Two shops in a nearby bazar were also torched, and four others vandalised. At least 10 people were injured.

Four days later, no case has been filed, and no arrests have been made.

When this correspondent visited the village on Sunday, the aftermath of the attack was evident. Twisted, charred corrugated tin sheets lay across yards. Inside the gutted homes, furniture, clothing, electronics, and household goods were reduced to ashes.

At least five burnt motorcycles and a motorised van stood in front of the houses. Trees were scorched, and silos had been set ablaze. Some women were seen trying to salvage partially burned paddy

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Men and women from different villages wait in separate lines to collect rice at Khornia Union Parishad office in Khulna's Dumuria upazila yesterday. The government is providing destitute families with 10kg of rice each for free under the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme ahead of Eid.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Trump vows to 'win' against Harvard

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump yesterday vowed to prevail in his clash with Harvard and again threatened to take away billions in funding from one of the world's top universities.

"I am considering taking Three Billion Dollars of Grant Money away from a very antisemitic Harvard, and giving it to TRADE SCHOOLS all across our land," Trump said, without giving details, in one of a flurry of texts yesterday, the Memorial Day holiday in the US.

He also brought up the issue of removing foreign students from Harvard -- a key source of enrollment and tuition money for the oldest university in the US -- saying he is waiting for Harvard to provide a list of these students.

Breakthrough on core reforms

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All parties supported reserving 100 seats for women in the lower house, though opinions vary on how those seats should be allocated.

The parties share the view that key parliamentary committees should be placed under opposition control, including those overseeing public accounts, estimates, and government undertakings.

On anti-corruption, all parties endorsed granting the Anti-Corruption Commission constitutional status, ensuring its transparency, independence and accountability. Most parties favour creating an Anti-Corruption Ombudsman to oversee the implementation of a national strategy on corruption, although a few parties remain partially supportive on this front.

There is unanimous backing for enacting a conflict-of-interest law, as well as bringing public service operations under full automation.

Another key point of agreement is the criminalisation of bribery in the private sector, aligning with international standards under the UN Convention Against Corruption.

In electoral reform, the majority of parties support the enactment of a comprehensive law governing the Election Commission.

There is also full agreement that the Election Commission should oversee local government polls and that political parties should be subject to the Right to Information Act.

The proposal to establish a separate, independent commission for electoral boundary delimitation also received strong backing.

A shared view has emerged around allowing a parliamentary committee to investigate and initiate legal proceedings against election commissioners who violate constitutional responsibilities.

Public administration reform also found relative convergence.

Most parties favour forming a commission to investigate officials involved in electoral fraud, corruption, or killings and torture during the July 2024 uprising.

Proposals to separate audits from accounts, restructure the Public Service Commission into three regional units, and restore local

magistrate courts at the upazila level were widely welcomed.

All parties agreed on revising outdated laws such as the Official Secrets Act of 1923 and modernising the Right to Information Act.

Most parties also support allowing direct election of mayors in municipalities and forming a permanent Public Administration Reform Commission.

Reform of the local government structure also sparked debate.

A proposal to reorganise Bangladesh into four provinces and abolish district councils failed to gain much traction.

Most parties also rejected the idea of electing mayors through ward commissioners instead of a direct public vote, and the suggestion to eliminate the upazila vice chairman post was broadly unpopular.

Disputes also remain over which civil rights to expand and how strongly the state should be bound to enforce them.

Additionally, the very process of amending the constitution continues to be contested.

Protests continue at Secretariat

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The restrictions were enforced following a public notice issued by the DMP commissioner. He urged all concerned to comply with the directive in the interest of maintaining law and order.

Meanwhile, National Citizen Party leader Hasnat Abdullah criticised the halt in administrative services and told protesting employees that they "can be replaced".

Protesters, under the banner of "Bangladesh Secretariat Officers and Employees Unity Forum", yesterday vowed to continue their agitation until the ordinance, which was gazetted on Sunday night, is repealed.

"Our demand is legitimate. That's why we have decided to continue our demonstration tomorrow [Tuesday]," said Nazrul Islam, co-general secretary of the forum.

Terming the ordinance repressive, Nazrul, also an officer at the public administration ministry, said, "We're not against the government; we're against this repressive law. If the government doesn't come to its senses, the movement will spread beyond the Secretariat to offices nationwide."

Badiul Kabir, co-chairman of the forum, added, "Our programmes will continue until this 'black law' or ordinance is completely withdrawn. Once it is repealed, we'll announce the end of our movement."

The interim government promulgated the ordinance just three days after it was approved by the Advisory Council last Thursday. The gazette came out on Sunday night.

Yesterday's demonstrations began around 11:00am, with several hundred employees assembling at Badamtola, near Building No 6 on the Secretariat premises.

From there, they marched to the Cabinet Division's new building and staged a brief sit-in.

The protesters then moved past Buildings No 4 and 5, entered Building No 6, and advanced toward the main entrance at Gate No 2. As employees gathered there, security personnel closed the gate. The nearby Gate No 3 was also shut for about half an hour as a precautionary measure.

Before wrapping up the demonstrations at around 2:30pm, the

leaders announced a fresh protest march for today, as a scheduled meeting with Law Adviser Asif Nazrul did not take place due to his reported unavailability.

Protest leaders then called on government office staffers across the country to hold similar programmes in solidarity.

Concerns over the ordinance have also been echoed by female Secretariat staffers, who are not often seen in protest. Several female officials were visibly active in the demonstrations against the ordinance.

Chameli Akter Banu, an administrative officer at the public administration ministry, told this newspaper, "We're worried as the ordinance mentions loyalty to individuals. If any officer makes inappropriate proposals and a female subordinate refuses, that officer might retaliate using this law. That's why we reject such a provision."

Lima Akter, an administrative officer at the commerce ministry, alleged that female employees are often subjected to harassment.

"As women, we balance both office duties and household responsibilities. Naturally, that may lead to occasional delays or minor issues. If even small mistakes result in punishment under this ordinance, how are we supposed to continue our jobs?"

Public administration expert and former additional secretary Firoz Mia called these concerns legitimate.

"The authorities have failed to demonstrate credibility in drafting such an important law. A law can be strict, but there is no room for repression," he told The Daily Star last night.

He added that several rules and regulations for government employees were weakened under the Awami League government, thus necessitating stricter laws. "However, the provisions included in the new Public Service Ordinance are repressive. Therefore, the ongoing protests by government employees are justified."

"Civil servants should remain loyal to the state, not to any individual. The proposed ordinance mentions loyalty to individuals, which is unacceptable in a modern bureaucracy."

Currently, there are around 1.5 million government officers and employees in

the country. Under the ordinance, all are considered public servants.

Meanwhile, civil service officers, protesting what they called discriminatory suspension and departmental actions by administration cadre officials against other cadres, are set to begin a countrywide pen down strike from today.

Their demands include the establishment of ministry-based professional autonomy, the abolition of the deputy secretary pool quota, and equality among all cadres.

A pen down strike is a form of protest where employees, especially those in administrative or desk-based roles, refuse to work by simply putting down their pens and halting duties.

According to a press release from the Inter-Cadre Discrimination Elimination Council, officers from 25 different cadres will observe the strike on May 27 and 28 (today and tomorrow), from 9:00am to 12:00pm. Emergency services, including hospital emergency departments, will remain outside its purview.

Blasting the Secretariat protests, NCP Chief Coordinator (South) Hasnat Abdullah yesterday warned of public backlash if ongoing administrative reforms are disrupted, saying the government employees should not assume they are irreplaceable.

"During the July uprising, you [Secretariat employees] wore black badges in support of Sheikh Hasina and continued work. Now you're threatening to bring work and all office services to a halt. But you didn't question Sheikh Hasina's authority, nor did anyone resign in protest [during the uprising]," he told journalists outside Biblob U'dyan at Sholashahar Gate No 2 in Chatotogram.

"If the fascist Awami League regime had remained in power, you would have gone back to flattering them and resumed your work."

He warned the protesting bureaucrats: "If you threaten this government and obstruct the reform process, we, the people, will take steps ... Remember that the people will find your replacements."

"If the government is held hostage in this way, let me warn you that the situation will not be good. I urge you to cooperate with the government and the reform agenda. If you have reservations, settle them internally and move forward."

Crime wave sparks fear in city dwellers

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government, the police have yet to regain their confidence -- an environment that criminals perceive as favourable for their activities."

He said many officers lack the specialised training needed to handle such volatile situations. "Policing alone is sometimes not enough -- community engagement is also essential to maintain law and order."

RECENT VIOLENT CRIMES

On Saturday night, a group of three muggers attacked a man beneath the Pallabi metro station around 11:30pm, stabbing him and fleeing with his phone.

The victim, Al-Amin Rana, an employee of a private firm at Nikunja, was returning home when the assailants blocked his way, attacked him with machetes, and snatched his iPhone.

"They took my iPhone -- but more importantly, they took away my sense of security," Rana told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said he filed a case with Pallabi Police Station, but no action was taken until the video went viral and media reports drew attention to the incident.

In another similar incident, a viral video shows three men robbing a man in broad daylight on Greenway Lane in Moghbazar on May 18, attacking him

with machetes. The muggers took his phone, Tk 14,000, and other belongings.

Hatirjheel Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Raju said police traced Abdullah, a restaurant worker, after the video surfaced and urged him to lodge a complaint.

Another chilling video from May 19 shows a BNP activist being hacked with sharp weapons on Central Road.

Meanwhile, Mohammadpur and its adjoining areas have seen a string of violent events in recent weeks.

On May 15, a man was killed and another injured in a mob beating during an alleged mugging attempt in Basila Housing City. Later that night, in another incident, seven members of a family were injured in an alleged attack by a teen gang in Jafrabad.

Two days prior, a group of masked youths carrying machetes were seen roaming openly in the Rayer Bazar area in the afternoon, as seen on CCTV footage. On May 18, six teenagers were seen chasing a youth with machetes in the Adabor area around 9:45pm.

On April 28, armed criminals opened fire in broad daylight at the office-cum-residence of a real estate businessman on Sher Shah Suri Road in Mohammadpur -- the second such incident in just over a month.

These incidents are taking place even as the army remains deployed in the capital with magistracy powers to assist in maintaining law and order.

Addressing a press briefing yesterday, Col Shafiqul Islam, colonel staff of the Directorate of Military Operations at Army Headquarters, said the army is working tirelessly to ensure public safety.

He said maintaining law and order is not solely the army's responsibility and stressed the need for coordinated action among all law enforcement agencies. "With joint efforts, we expect the situation to improve."

Speaking to The Daily Star, SN Md Nazrul Islam, additional commissioner (crime and operations) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said Dhaka is a megacity, and it is unrealistic to expect it to be entirely free of crime.

"We have already detected and arrested suspects in several recent cases. For the incidents that occurred over the past two to three days, investigations are ongoing, and we are making progress."

Referring to the Badda killing, he said, "Using CCTV footage, we're close to identifying the perpetrators."

"There is no reason for city residents to worry. We are fully aware of the situation and are working with utmost professionalism."

2.1m people lost jobs, 86% of them women

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benefits through employers.

Women also bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, limiting their paid employment opportunities.

Nearly two-thirds of young women are classified as NEET -- neither in employment, education, nor training -- reflecting significant underutilisation of their potential.

Overseas employment for Bangladeshi women has sharply declined. Monthly female migrant departures dropped from 8,789 in 2022 to 4,610 so far in 2025, Khan said, citing data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.

Reports of forced labour, physical abuse and sexual harassment abroad underline the urgent need for better protection, he added.

"Bangladesh's improved Global Gender Gap ranking largely reflects women's political representation in the previous government. Economic, educational, and health indicators tell a less encouraging story. Progress in these areas remains limited compared to other countries."

Bangladesh ranks 99th overall in the

Gender Gap Index, 146th in Economic Participation and Opportunity, and 129th in Health and Survival.

"Gender empowerment progress is plateauing or reversing in key areas. Gender empowerment cannot be solved piecemeal and must receive greater focus in electoral debates," Khan said.

He recommended tracking investments and policy attention in women's employment, skills, health and safety as key indicators of a gender-sensitive budget.

Though a fully integrated approach may not be possible in the next fiscal year's budget, these issues should feature prominently in upcoming discussions, he added.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, convenor of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, underscored the urgent need for Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB).

Women are disproportionately impacted by economic stressors like high inflation and declining private investment -- issues often downplayed in official narratives, said Bhattacharya, also a distinguished fellow at CPD.

Gitanjali Singh, UN Women Bangladesh representative, reiterated

the relevance of the Beijing Platform for Action and called for institutionalising GRB across all ministries.

She emphasised priority areas such as preventing child marriage, building inclusive infrastructure and enhancing social protection, particularly in light of Bangladesh's upcoming LDC graduation.

While 44 ministries currently produce gender budget reports, the quality of data and its alignment with SDGs and climate budget coding remain inadequate for driving transformative change, said Nubayra Jeheem, programme analyst -- Gender Statistics at UN Women Bangladesh.

Rekha Saha, Secretary of Central Legal Aid at Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, presented a 'Charter of Demand and Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment', developed in collaboration with Bonhishikha and supported by UN Women.

The charter advocates for enhanced women's participation, economic empowerment, representation in decision-making and more inclusive budget priorities reflecting the needs of marginalised groups.