

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 Dahir Moshiahath 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, Tariqul 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 Dahir Moshiahath. 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 bazaar 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

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.

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 phone.

"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

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.

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

Hatirjheel Police Station Officer in Charge Md Raju said police traced Abdulla, 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 Jafraab.

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.

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."

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."

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

"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 quality of data and its alignment with SDGs and climate budget coding remain inadequate for driving transformative change, said Nubraya Jeheen, 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.

When his attention was drawn to debates in social media, Nazim said, "Sometimes, even in families, there can be misunderstandings. Similarly, different stakeholders may express varying opinions in the course of running a country. But that does not mean there's division or conflict. Nothing of that sort has happened."

He reiterated that the military has always worked with the government and will continue to do so in future.

"Let us not overcomplicate things. The government and the army are not at odds. We are working together, and I firmly believe we will continue to do so even more effectively in the days ahead."

Addressing the issue of the "humanitarian corridor" raised in some media reports, Nazim clarified,

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 bands 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 Biplobi Udayan at Sholashahar Gate No 2 in Chattogram.

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

Hewarned 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."

Army, govt are working together

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to do it ourselves. And if anything goes wrong, we are equally responsible for that too."

Responding to a journalist's question about the "humanitarian corridor", he urged the media not to misrepresent the ongoing discussions regarding the government-military relationship.

"I don't believe this issue has reached a point to warrant such criticism or speculation. The government and the Bangladesh Army are working in close coordination and complementing each other. We follow the government's directives. There is no reason to interpret it otherwise," he said.

When his attention was drawn to debates in social media, Nazim said, "Sometimes, even in families, there can be misunderstandings. Similarly, different stakeholders may express varying opinions in the course of running a country. But that does not mean there's division or conflict. Nothing of that sort has happened."

He reiterated that the military has always worked with the government and will continue to do so in future.

"Let us not overcomplicate things. The government and the army are not at odds. We are working together, and I firmly believe we will continue to do so even more effectively in the days ahead."

Addressing the issue of the "humanitarian corridor" raised in some media reports, Nazim clarified,

"We're trying to verify for whom the uniforms were made... We are not taking this lightly. It concerns national security," he added.

Responding to concerns about groups like ARSA or JSS compromising border security, Brig Gen Nazim said, "Absolutely not. We will never compromise our sovereignty. This is our country, and we will protect it at all costs."