3 Hindu homes vandalised, looted over FB post

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
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Three homes belonging to Hindu families were vandalised and looted in Rangpur's Pirganj upazila on Monday night over a Facebook post that allegedly hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims, police said.

The owner of the affected houses are Bishu Chandra Mohanta, 50; his elder brother Jagadish Chandra Mohanta, 60; and their younger brother Dinesh Chandra Mohanta, 46 -- all residents of Chak Karimpur village.

According to police, Bishu's son, Saurav Chandra Mohanta, 22, who works at a garment factory in Gazipur, shared a video on Facebook several months ago that allegedly hurt the religious sentiments of local Muslims.

Although Saurav later deleted the post, its screenshots resurfaced on Sunday, triggering tension in the area and leading to the attack, said Nazmul Haque, officer-in-charge of Pirganj Police Station.

Law enforcers detained Saurav early yesterday in Kichak Bela village of

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3



Garment workers block the Dhaka-Tangail highway demanding a minimum monthly wage of Tk 30,000. The protest caused disruption to traffic on the highway yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

CPB demands justice after alleging attack on party office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and several left-leaning political organisations yesterday condemned what they described as an attack on the party's central office, Mukti Bhaban, in the capital's Purana Paltan, though police said no such incident had taken place.

In a statement, CPB President Kazi Sajjad Zahir Chandan and General Secretary Abdullah Kafi Ratan said attacks carried out on the basis of false accusations against people holding different political views undermine democracy, political coexistence and the right to engage in political activities freely.

They also demanded that those responsible for the attack be identified and brought to justice.

According to the statement, a group of people carrying sticks gathered in front of Mukti Bhaban on Monday night and attempted to force their way into the building by breaking its main gate.

The group identified itself as activists of the ruling party and alleged that members of a banned political organisation were staying inside the CPB office, the statement said.

When CPB leaders and activists tried to prevent them from entering, the group turned violent, leaving several people injured, it added.

The statement further alleged that the group continued to surround the building even after police arrived and took charge of its security. They also demanded that the alleged members

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5

Japan to invest $6.35b, create 2 lakh jobs in 5yrs

FROM PAGE 1

six instruments: four memorandums of cooperation (MoCs), a letter of intent (LoI), and a letter concerning grant aid.

The MoCs cover economic relations and improvement of the business environment; cooperation in agriculture; and cooperation in fisheries and livestock. The two agriculture-related areas are intended to strengthen business ties and attract investment. The LoI concerns climate change cooperation, while the grant-aid letter provides for up to 2.12 billion yen ($13 million) for a maritime security capacity-building project.

Tarique reached Tokyo on Monday on a four-day official visit at the invitation of his Japanese counterpart. The two leaders yesterday held a summit meeting, followed by a joint press appearance and lunch.

At the start of the meeting, Takaichi said Japan strongly supported Bangladesh's ability to make its own decisions and strengthen its resilience under Japan's updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision. She said Japan wanted to further develop bilateral relations under the Strategic Partnership and contribute to regional peace and prosperity.

Tarique said the two leaders had held fruitful discussions on a broad range of bilateral, regional, and international issues.

"Reaffirming our long-standing friendship, we expressed our shared commitment to further strengthening our partnership through enhanced cooperation in energy, ICT, rail, and infrastructure, deep-sea ports, and foreign direct investment," he said.

"Our ambition is clear: to turn this friendship between our two nations into a powerful engine of economic opportunity and shared prosperity."

INVESTMENT, TRADE

Takaichi commended the efforts of Tarique's administration to promote foreign direct investment and stressed the need to improve Bangladesh's investment environment.

She expressed the expectation that Tarique's leadership would help create conditions conducive to Japanese business activities and promote public-private cooperation. Tarique said Bangladesh would work towards that goal transparently.

The two leaders welcomed a memorandum of cooperation between Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and Bangladesh's Economic Relations Division on economic relations and improving the business environment. They also welcomed two separate MoCs covering agriculture and fisheries and livestock.

The joint statement said the two countries would promote resilient supply chains and explore further cooperation in digital transformation, the development of skilled ICT professionals, and secure digital connectivity.

Takaichi also said Japan looked forward to further discussions on Bangladesh's request to accede to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement.

The two prime ministers welcomed the signing of the Bangladesh-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and reaffirmed their commitment to its early entry into force. They said the agreement would help expand trade and investment, promote industrial diversification, and support Bangladesh's smooth and sustainable graduation from least developed country status.

ENERGY SECURITY

Japan will provide a 50-billion-yen loan, equivalent to around $317 million, under the "Emergency Support Loan for Enhancing Economic Resilience and Stable Energy Supply".

The loan is the first yen-loan project under Japan's Partnership on Wide Energy and Resources Resilience Asia (POWERR Asia) initiative.

Recognising volatility in global energy markets and rising energy prices, the two leaders stressed the importance of international cooperation to strengthen oil stockpiles and improve coordination between energy-producing and consuming countries.

Takaichi promised Japan's continued support for Bangladesh's energy infrastructure to help bridge the gap between energy supply and demand.

The two countries also agreed to deepen cooperation on climate change, energy efficiency, and renewable energy.

CONNECTIVITY, SECURITY

Under the upgraded BIG-B framework, the two countries will work to strengthen regional connectivity, improve resilience against natural disasters and geopolitical uncertainties, promote public-private partnerships, and step up cooperation for peace and stability.

They agreed to advance preparatory work for the early operationalisation of the third terminal of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

They also expressed their aspiration to move forward with the early construction of Dhaka metro rail lines and discuss future cooperation on the operation and management of Matarbari Deep Seaport.

According to the statement, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to work towards upholding international order, which is free, open, and based on the rule of law. To this end, Tarique noted the importance of Takaichi's initiative of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)".

The statement further welcomed a pledge for a yen-loan programme for the second phase of the Upazila Governance and Development Project, aimed at strengthening the administrative and fiscal capacities of local governments.

The two leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to cooperation in education, skills development, public health, disaster management, and sustainable local governance.

Following the bilateral meeting, Tarique visited the onshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal and power plant of JERA, a major Japanese energy company, in Futtsu city in Japan's Chiba Prefecture. He also visited the Nittsu logistics hub.

Besides, Tarique will today call on the governor of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), visit UNIQLO's Ariake office, and meet the president of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO).

He is also scheduled to meet representatives of Mitsui & Co, Sumitomo Corp and JERA, and attend the Bangladesh-Japan Economic Forum, where MoUs on education and human resource development are expected to be inked.

On the final day of his tour, the PM will visit a Toyota factory before departing for Dhaka.

Govt distances itself from IGP's comments

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking at a programme on Monday, IGP Fakir said, "Wherever crossfire is necessary, if the government allows it, we will do that."

The Police Headquarters later issued a clarification, saying the IGP had not intended to endorse extrajudicial killings. It said he had used the term "crossfire" in its "literal sense" while stressing firm action against drug traffickers, terrorists, extortionists and other criminals threatening public safety.

BNP acting Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said the IGP's remarks were "embarrassing" for the government and expressed concern that such comments were made at a time when the BNP, which had long opposed enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, was in power.

Rizvi, who also serves as the prime minister's political adviser, made the comments while inaugurating a free medical camp outside the BNP's central office in Nayapaltan, marking the 48th founding anniversary of Jubo Dal.

Asked why no action had been taken against the IGP, Prime Minister's Adviser on Information and Cultural Affairs Zahed Ur Rahman said Tarique Rahman, who is currently abroad, would decide the matter upon his return from Japan.

The Bangladesh Police Service Association has defended the IGP, saying an unfortunate choice of words can occur in public remarks but should not be construed as support for extrajudicial killings.

"The prime minister is not in the country. He will consider the matter himself. The government's final position on this issue will be determined by the prime minister, perhaps after he completes his visit," Zahed told reporters at the weekly press briefing at the Secretariat.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Police Service Association (BPSA) has defended the IGP, saying an unfortunate choice of words can occur in public remarks but should not be construed as support for extrajudicial killings.

In a statement, the BPSA said Bangladesh Police conducts its activities in accordance with the constitution and the law, and that performing duties with firmness, impartiality and professionalism, without exceeding legal limits, is essential for maintaining public confidence.

It added that the IGP's remarks could be seen as a call for the strict and uncompromising enforcement of existing laws, the proper exercise of police authority and a stronger role in combating crime and protecting public safety.

Speaking on the association's defence, BPSA General Secretary Shamima Pervin, superintendent of police, Dhaka, said a poor choice of words can occur while speaking and should not be interpreted as support for extrajudicial killings.

"Our position is that police must act within the law to protect people's lives and property," she said. "Neither our statement nor the association endorses any action outside the law."

Cops map teen gangs; legal action remains tricky

FROM PAGE 1

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the SRB had detained 174 suspected gang members since February 12.

However, police acknowledge that identifying and detaining suspected gang members is easier than taking further legal action when no specific offence can be established against them.

Additional IGP Sayedur Rahman and SRB Director General Md Ahsan Habib said the difficulty often lay in proceeding against suspected gang members and alleged patrons without specific criminal allegations.

Sayedur said the police had to act within the law while addressing the problem.

"If we arrest juveniles under the Special Powers Act, it will not be a good practice. We can be strict but cannot be cruel," he said.

He added that investigators would also examine whether politically influential people were patronising juvenile gangs.

According to police officials, adult criminals often use teenagers to commit offences for personal gain, exploiting their vulnerability and the comparatively lenient treatment juveniles may receive under the law.

Teenagers can also be easier to influence and recruit into criminal activities, they said.

OUTDATED LISTS

The planned nationwide initiative also highlights the absence of a comprehensive, up-to-date database of juvenile gangs. Different police units maintain their own lists, many of which are outdated and may not reflect the situation on the ground.

Existing PHQ data list 307 teen gangs nationwide, including 93 under Chattogram Metropolitan Police, 78 under Dhaka Range and 54 under Chattogram Range.

The DMP list contains 41 gangs, while Khulna Metropolitan Police has 13, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police 12, Sylhet Metropolitan Police five, Barishal Metropolitan Police three and Khulna Range four.

No gangs are listed under Gazipur Metropolitan Police, Rangpur Metropolitan Police, Rajshahi Range or Barishal Range.

PHQ data further show that 270 members of 48 gangs faced 69 criminal cases during the first nine months of this year. Of those cases, 21, or 30.4 percent, were linked to gang clashes.

The 48 gangs had 577 listed members, according to the data.

CUMILLA DRIVES

The nationwide plan comes amid intensified police action in Cumilla following the September 18 killing of Ishayat Shahriar Oprotim, a Class VII student and son of Nahida Begum, an associate professor of Bangla at Comilla University.

Police launched coordinated anti-gang drives on September 23, involving all 18 police stations in the district and the Detective Branch.

The alleged involvement of teen gang members in the killing fuelled demands for stronger action against juvenile crime.

By October 15, police had detained 2,811 suspected teen gang members in Cumilla alone. Many were subsequently released on bonds furnished by their families.

The scale of the detentions raises questions about how police distinguish between those suspected of specific crimes and teenagers identified through gang mapping.

Separately, a young man was stabbed in the abdomen and his father was shot in the leg when six masked assailants attacked them in Mohammadpur on October 15. Police suspect the attack stemmed from a longstanding rivalry between two criminal gangs, identified as the Patali and Sazzad groups.

Police and local residents described the groups as juvenile gangs allegedly involved in drug dealing, snatching, and extortion, with older youths directing their activities. Their operations reportedly extend across several parts of Mohammadpur, where gang-related crime remains a persistent concern.

ARRESTS ALONE WON'T DO

Md Omar Faruk, a professor of criminology and police science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said arresting or detaining juveniles alone would not solve the problem.

He said teen gangs often operate under the patronage of politically backed individuals who use them to commit crimes. Law enforcers should target these patrons, he added.

"Bringing their political patrons to justice would significantly reduce teen gang culture and related crimes," he said.

Many gang members, he said, are rootless, beyond parental control and addicted to drugs. Those already involved in gangs need close monitoring, care, and counselling.

"Every part of society must be involved in tackling this problem. The police alone cannot do it," he said.

Another round of LPG price hike likely

FROM PAGE 1

when consumers are paying more than the commission-fixed price for more than a month now, according to market participants and consumers interviewed by The Daily Star.

When the BERC rate was Tk 1,585, consumers paid Tk 2,500 for the 12kg cylinder amid a supply crunch. Then on October 4, the BERC raised the price to Tk 1,837, but the retail prices remained above Tk 2,200.

Subsequently, more than one crore LPG users continue to pay between Tk 2,200 and Tk 2,400 for a cylinder, The Daily Star learnt from discussions with at least 10 consumers, six retailers, two distributors and two importers.

Under the announced pricing structure, distributors are supposed to receive a 12kg cylinder from importers and bottlers at Tk 1,752. With a distribution charge of Tk 50 per cylinder, distributors are supposed to sell it to retailers at Tk 1,802.

The prescribed retail charge is Tk 45 per 12kg cylinder, which brings the final price to Tk 1,847.

In contrast, The Daily Star found that distributors are paying more than Tk 1,850 per cylinder and charging retailers substantially more than the prescribed distribution charge, resulting in retailers paying at least Tk 2,100 per cylinder.

Against the fixed retail charge of Tk 45 per cylinder, retailers are charging an additional Tk 200-300, pushing the price further above the official rate.

Amid this backdrop, four distributors from Dhaka, Cumilla, Chattogram and Gazipur on October 13 applied to the BERC for an increase in distribution and retail charges as fuel costs, licence fees and other expenses increased.

All four sought an increase in the distribution charge from Tk 50 to Tk 150 per cylinder and the retail charge from Tk 45 to Tk 70.

The applications, which had similar wording, said that importers and bottling companies were adjusting their prices more than once a month bypassing the rates fixed by BERC.

The distribution charge fixed by the BERC is insufficient to cover operating costs, said an LPG distributor in the Tejgaon area.

Companies did not deliver cylinders to distributors' warehouses as per the BERC rules, forcing distributors to arrange their own transport.

"Some companies supply LPG cylinders at Tk 1,742 each, but we have to spend another Tk 40-50 per cylinder to bring them to our warehouses. We often have to wait two to three days to collect the cylinders."

Loading, unloading, labour, transport and other operating expenses further increased costs, leaving distributors unable to operate profitably within the prescribed charges, he said.

According to the distributor, companies including Omera, BM, Total and Aygaz are supplying cylinders at the fixed rate, while the others are charging between Tk 2,000 and Tk 2,080.

The wider market is influenced by the rates charged by some major suppliers, he said, while acknowledging that distributors were charging high prices.

Distributors have stopped providing receipts for months, said a retailer in the Moghbazar area.

"If we ask for a receipt, they tell us they will stop our supply. We have to collect a cylinder from them at Tk 2,100 or Tk 2,200. How can we sell it at the official rate?" he said.

LPG importers have also sought an increase in storage and bottling charges to Tk 25 per kilogram from Tk 16.74, citing higher financing costs for working capital and project loans, as well as expenses related to compliance with safety standards.

In its proposal, the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh said that operators, distributors and retailers respected the BERC-announced prices but cannot always comply because the rates are not adjusted quickly enough to reflect changing market conditions.

Several LPG companies have created an artificial shortage by stockpiling cylinders, said M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

"Consumers are being held hostage in a market dominated by profiteering, while BERC remains inactive. Now another public hearing is being held to increase prices."

He called for a judicial investigation to identify and punish those involved in stockpiling. The licences of companies found responsible should be cancelled, he said.

The private sector accounts for around 99 percent of the country's LPG market.

Good start, but delivery will make the difference

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh, wedged between India and South East Asia on top of the Bay of Bengal, is key to Sanae Takaichi's vision of a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

The statement reads, "Prime Minister Rahman noted the importance of Prime Minister Takaichi's initiative of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)' in ensuring peace, stability and prosperity for all."

Other than a commitment of about 50 billion yen, worth almost $317 million for fuel purchase, the joint statement projects a private investment of about $6.33 billion over five years, creating two lakh jobs. While there is naturally no guarantee, Kataoka says with conviction that "it is very realistic". There is also mention of a Japanese business delegation visiting Bangladesh soon, perhaps to further explore possibilities. A loan for a project to improve the investment environment as mentioned in the statement, without any specific figures also appears to be a rational decision.

The two prime ministers agreed on reform of the UN Security Council, including expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership. But there was nothing significant or forthcoming from Japan as regards the Rohingyas are concerned as joint statement expressed concern over the worsening crisis in Myanmar. The statement called for immediate cessation of violence, release of those detained, conducive environment for humanitarian assistance; "and dialogue between all parties and affected groups, including the Rohingyas".

Although there had been reports of both countries working on the language to signify an elevation of relations from "strategic partnership" to "comprehensive strategic partnership", it did not materialise. There was also an expectation, based on reports, that this visit would result in loans and financial support worth around $2 billion dollars. That does not seem to have materialised either. However, a full assessment of the complete package of assistance can only be done once the details of the deals signed during the visit become clearer.