

SSC exams in fresh trouble

20-party extends hartal till 6am Friday; 12 hurt in arson attacks on vehicles

STAR REPORT

Around 1.5 million candidates of SSC and equivalent exams were once again thrown into uncertainty as the BNP-led alliance yesterday extended the ongoing hartal till Friday morning, coinciding with the exams scheduled for Thursday.

The government made yet another fervent plea to the 20-party alliance to eschew hartal. It will decide today whether or not to postpone Thursday's exam.

On top of the indefinite blockade, the alliance has been enforcing hartal since February 1, excluding Fridays and Saturdays, compelling the education ministry to reschedule exams. Several tests have already been deferred due to the blockade and shutdowns.

At least 69 people were killed since the BNP-led alliance had announced the blockade on January 5. Most of the deceased were victims of the mindless arson attacks on passenger buses and trucks. Several hundred injured are still groaning in the hospital beds.

More than four crore primary and secondary-level students are beset with uncertainty from the beginning of the new year.

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They received new textbooks but could not start their classes properly. Although many schools have remained open despite the blockade, presence of students is thin, especially in the city and town areas.

Meanwhile, the government shot down the proposal by several eminent personalities for a national dialogue with the BNP.

The BNP-led alliance extended their 72 hour hartal to Friday 6:00am, protesting the "arrest and killing of its leaders and activists". It also demanded the release of the party leaders, including acting secretary general Mirza Fakrul Islam Alamgir.

The hartal coincided with Thursday's exam on Religion under eight general education boards as well as on Fikha and Usulul Fikha under Madrasa Board and Physics Second Paper under Vocational Board.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday expressed hope that the hartal would be called off considering the future of the students.

Meanwhile, sporadic incidents of violence marked the third day of hartal yesterday as pickets exploded crude bombs and carried out arson and vandalism across the country.

At least 12 people were injured in arson attacks on vehicles while criminals set fire to at least 12 vehicles, including a passenger bus, a private car, a covered van and trucks, at different places across the country, said police and fire service officials.

In Feni, two passengers were burnt and seven others injured when alleged blockaders hurled crude bombs at a bus at Dagonbhuiyan upazila around 9:15pm.

The burn victims were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. One of them received 20 percent burns. They were first taken to Feni Sadar Hospital, reports our Feni correspondent, quoting Fayeze Ahmed, duty doctor at Feni Sadar Hospital.

The identities of rest of the victims could not be known immediately.

In a separate incident, criminals set fire to three buses of Star Line parked inside the company's bus depot in the town around 11:30pm, said Jahangir, inspector of Feni fire station.

Jahangir added that miscreants exploded several crude bombs in front of the police check post located beside the fire station in the town at 9:00pm.

In Mymensingh, a truck driver was burnt when suspected blockaders hurled petrol bombs at the vehi-

cle at Gauripur around 11:55pm, police said.

Another trucker and his helper were burnt as alleged blockaders hurled a petrol bomb at their sand-laden truck around 9:00pm at Durgapur in Netrokona.

The injured were rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, said Rezaul Islam Khan, officer-in-charge of Durgapur Police Station.

In Chittagong, a mob caught and beat up a youth named Rubel while he was fleeing after exploding a crude bomb on a road near Bandar Police Station around 11:00am yesterday. Locals handed over Rubel to police later.

Jahedul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station, said Rubel, during primary interrogation, admitted that he was hired for exploding bombs in exchange of Tk 800 and also disclosed the names who hired him.

The OC, however, declined to divulge the names.

In Bogra, alleged activists of Awami League vandalised furniture inside a BNP office in the town, triggering a chase and counter chase between the ruling party and BNP men. Jubo League Municipality unit president Masum was injured in the incident. In two separate incidents, alleged blockaders hurled petrol bombs at two goods-laden trucks in the district.

In Jhalakathi, suspected blockaders set alight the vehicle of AL-backed Nalcity upazila chairman, police said. Criminals hurled a petrol bomb at the jeep parked inside his garage, he added.

In Bhola, alleged blockaders set fire to an oil tanker and vandalised a truck in Daulatkhan upazila.

In Munshiganj, police arrested two BNP men in connection with Monday's arson attack on a truck which was carrying some 38000 books.

Meanwhile, law enforcers detained 46 BNP-Jamaat men from Chapainawabganj, 13 from Rangpur and five from Noakhali.

In Dhaka, detectives picked up Abdus Sattar Patwari, office secretary of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, from Dhanmondi yesterday afternoon. He will be produced before court today, Krishna Pada Roy, deputy commissioner (South) of the Detective Branch of Police, told The Daily Star.

Alleged blockaders hurled a crude bomb at a bus in the city's Mohammadpur area early yesterday, leaving a passenger injured. He received splinter injuries.