

Dwellers question security system in the city

Numerous blasts at 40 points in 30 minutes force them to live in fear

SULTANA RAHMAN

City dwellers are still in shock after last week's countrywide bomb attacks including the capital.

Authorities have now taken measures to beef-up security after the sudden attack that left the entire country in state of panic.

How efficient is the security system is a question in the minds of every citizen, who blame intelligence agencies for the failure in ensuring security.

Intelligence agencies did not have a clue of the attacks to take precautions, observed many.

Bombs went off within a span of half an hour just before noon on August 17 at 40 important and busy locations such as the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Secretariat, the Supreme Court, Hotel Sheraton and the Zia International Airport.

"The worst did not happen, but could have. The perpetrators of the countrywide bomb attacks were somewhat kind, as they did not use the deadliest weapons as available in the arsenals of their international comrades. If they had, there would have been a national catastrophe of astronomical magnitude," said Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury.

A close-look into the entire network of intelligence acting to prevent terror attacks, reveals that a good number of agency personnel are underqualified and not fully trained, a source said.

These intelligence personnel are so poorly armed and equipped that many suffer from frustration. The secret agencies supposed to provide information



from all corners include the Special Branch (SB), the National Security Intelligence (NSI), the Army Security Unit (ASU), the Military Intelligence (MI) and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI).

Field level agents of these agencies allege that top level officials of these secret agencies purchase expensive vehicles but do not spend money on equipment to make the agencies stronger and effective to counter modern-day terrorists.

"Poor remuneration also force these agents to disclose their identities in order to make unlawful gains," alleged an agent requesting not to be named.

A senior officer of the SB said, every state-secret agent team is supposed to submit a daily report of the respective areas to their superiors.

"When the reports are analysed, it could be seen that they had been written by extremely unskilled persons," he added.

"The entire network structure

of secret agencies should be revised to face the challenges of 'new trend of high-tech terrorism,' the official observed.

It is also alleged that some field level personnel cannot read nor write properly and are physically unfit as they hardly undergo any physical training. Arms they carry often fail to function because of rust and communication devices like walkie-talkies frequently breakdown. Transmitting frequencies at field level are very weak or are kept

busy by top officials that urgent messages cannot be passed on.

An agent had to wait for almost 20 minutes to pass a message on the walkie-talkie when he found an unexploded bomb at the Dhaka University (DU) campus.

At a recent international conference on water issue, an NSI agent was seen desperately urging pressmen to tell him what the speakers had said in English. When inquired why such a person was deployed there, an official said: 'the only people who under-

stand English are the top officials of the agencies who hardly cover these conferences.'

Politicisation of these agencies is one of the main causes behind such situations. Another NSI official said that top-level recruitment is done judging the individual's loyalty to the ruling party.

"Between 1996 and 2000 most posts in the capital were filled up by people who come from the greater Faridpur area," said a frustrated official of an agency. "When the BNP-Jamat alliance took over power, the Faridpur group was removed and replaced by people, blessed by the coalition," he added.

With these changes the chain of command breaks down and at the field level, agents lose their interest in their jobs, said the source.

However, the law enforcing agencies launched a massive drive to nab criminals responsible for the serial bomb blasts across the country. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has added 40 more check posts and 1500 more security personnel to the capital after the blasts. However, DMP were able to net only six suspects from Zia International Airport and Bangla Motor after the blasts.

Ruhul Amin, a suspect sustained injuries during the blasts at Banglamotor and was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

"The Detective Branch (DB) personnel took him for interrogation," said SM Mizanur Rahman, DMP commissioner. He urged city dwellers to co-operate with the police to build community awareness.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"It is not an isolated incident and has been done in an organised way with an objective. We had intelligence reports of some attacks between August 14 and 16, but we had no information of attacks on August 17"

-- Lutfuzzaman Babar
State Minister for Home Affairs

Told journalists after the orchestrated bomb attacks across the country, on August 17.
Source: The Daily Star

"The bomb attacks were made at the instigation of the Prime Minister. She left Dhaka for China giving green signal to carry out the blast. The Khaleda-Nizami government must answer to the people"



-- Sheikh Hasina
Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition

Told newsmen on the Mawa ferry on her way back to Dhaka from Tungipara blaming the Prime Minister for the series of bomb blasts, on August 17.
Source: The Daily Star

"They (Awami League) want to create political issues as they don't have a genuine issue against the government"

-- Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain
Health Minister and BNP standing committee member

Told a gathering organised by the BNP city unit, to protest the bomb blasts, blaming the main opposition Awami League for the orchestrated bombings, on August 17.
Source: The Daily Star

"They have tried for five years... We're a successive government, but not a revolutionary government. This question has to be addressed to the nation"

-- M Morshed Khan
Foreign Minister

Told journalists when asked about the previous Awami League government's initiative to sign an extradition treaty with the US government to bring back some absconding convicts of the Bangabandhu murder case, on August 15.
Source: The Daily Star

"...After all these we will continue to say that MP Nizam and his brother Maruf kidnapped our father"

-- Chowdhury Farhan Reza Liton
Son of Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury abducted business magnate and Chittagong BNP leader

Said dismissing the statement of Shahid Chairman, prime suspect in the abduction, made before the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and journalists after his arrest, terming it 'confusing' and 'misleading', on August 16.
Source: Prothom Alo

Pongu hospital paralysed by bungling

IMRUL HASAN

Patients are being deprived of proper treatment at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), popularly known as Pongu Hospital, due to mismanagement and shortage of doctors and nurses.

The tyranny of middlemen at the hospital is another major reason for the patients' sufferings as the authorities are helpless with the situation. The middlemen often force the patients to go to private clinics for treatment.

"The patients complained that they do not see doctors, nurses and staff when needed. They are not examined properly while the hospital staff does not provide them with necessary medicine.

"The condition of my patient is worsening day by day. I have been waiting for two days but I have not seen a doctor," said Shamin Akhter, sister of a patient said helplessly at the women's ward of the hospital.

"The service is inadequate. But the charge is as high as of the private clinics. So I have decided to shift my patient to a clinic," said Salma Rahman, relative of another patient at the women's ward.

The patients alleged that no one at the hospital cares about their sufferings. They are held hostage by the staff and middlemen just after entering the hospital. They have to pay additional fees to get the service of emergency, operation theatre and all kinds of medical tests and examinations.

"During the last two weeks I had my X-ray and serological tests three times. I was forced to pay extra amount to the staff," said a patient at the ward number 'A'.

Sources said the middlemen influence the patients to go outside the hospital for treatment with the active support of a section of hospital staff.

"We have contracts with private clinics. For each patient we take to the clinics we get five to

ten percent commission on the admission fees," said one of the brokers on condition of anonymity.

When asked, a high official of the hospital said it is very difficult to identify those who are engaged in such activities. "We cannot take action unless we get evidence or specific complaints from any patients."

But another official seeking anonymity said, "A big group from the hospital and private clinics is active at the emergency gate of the hospital to take the patients outside. Many of them often enter the wards with trolleys and pick up patients right in front of us without any release order."

A notice board is hung at the hospital to alert the patients about the brokers. But they are helpless as the authorities remain silent on the issue.

When asked, Prof Md Sirajul-Islam, director of the hospital, said: "I am trying my best to stop the menace but when I inspect the spot, they leave the scene."

Most of the wards, especially

post-operative ward, para ward, IJ ward and A/B ward, and adjacent toilets always remain in a dirty and unhygienic condition, posing serious health hazard to the patients.

The authorities seem to have no headache to improve the situation.

The doctors and nurses have repeatedly complained of the unhygienic condition of the wards and toilets, but no action has been taken so far. Patients and their visitors are also responsible for this, the hospital staff said.

When asked, a senior nurse of the para ward said, "It is not possible for the existing manpower to keep the hospital clean. The condition will not improve unless the patients and visitors are conscious about cleanliness."

The hospital authorities cannot provide all the patients with bed due to the admission of huge number of patients. Many of them stay on the floor. A patient has to wait for several weeks to get a bed.

Asked about the chaotic situa-

tion of the hospital, Prof Islam said, "What else can I do alone. I have taken various steps to improve the situation. But the doctors, nurses and staff should be more sincere in their work."

He stressed the need for more awareness of the doctors, officials, nurses and staff to ensure smooth management of the hospital.

The hospital has a total of 500 beds. But the number of patients is at least three times the bed capacity. More than 500 outdoor patients come to the hospital daily.



Brokers roam in front of Pongu Hospital to force patients to shift to private clinics.



Choptoti vendors in front of the National Museum use electricity illegally drawn from electric poles.

Legalising illegal power connections

Desa move to save Tk 25 lakh a month evaded by hawkers

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Hawkers in the city pilfer around 2.5 lakh units of electricity through illegal connections, causing the government a loss of Tk 25 lakh per month, a Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa) estimate says.

"More than 80 percent of the hawkers run their shop at night taking illegal connections from roadside electric poles," said Mahboob Sarwar-e-Kainat, superintending engineer, Segunbagicha Circle, Desa.

The Segunbagicha Circle in June last took an initiative to stop electricity pilferage by bringing the hawkers under the coverage of legal connections. The hawkers have been given connections from a certain point having authorised meter.

"We preferred the association of the hawkers to give lines to its members. Where there is no such association we called them to nominate someone who would take the connection and give lines to the hawkers at a fixed rate. The person nominated by them is responsible for paying the bill," said Kainat.

Desa has brought six hawkers' points in the city under the coverage of legal connection. There are more than 250 hawkers' points in the city. Desa is going to formulate a policy to legalise all these points.

"The policy will be submitted to the higher authorities. If they approve it we will bring the hawkers and slum-dwellers, who use electricity illegally, under billing system," the Desa engineer said. The policy will suggest easy methods of taking power connections and paying bills.

"If we can implement the policy, the power sector will get rid of electricity pilferage to a large extent and our earning will increase," he hoped.

The six points that have got the legal electricity connections are Bangabazar, Golap Shah Mazar, south and north part of Baitul Mukaram, flower market of Shahbagh, Bangabandhu Avenue, and the pottery market beside Shishu Academy.

Every point in the city where hawkers sit and run their business till night has electricity connections. Some of the hawkers claimed that their lines have been taken from nearby shops that have legal connections but it has been seen that most of the connections came from the main line illegally.

The hawkers said the 'linemen' (extortionists) manage electric lines for them and they pay for it. "Toll collectors

arrange lines for us, taking Tk 20 per day for each line. We are allowed to use only one bulb," said Nurnabi, a hawker at Farm Gate.

The hawkers in the city appreciated the initiative taken by Desa to provide them with legal power connections. "If we can pay Tk 600 per month to the linemen, we can easily pay it to the government using illegal connections," said Abul Kalam, another hawker at Farm Gate.

He appealed to the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to take similar initiative to make their possessions legal. "We pay Tk 300 on average every day to the linemen and Tk 9,000 to the police per month. If DCC legalises our possessions, we can pay this amount to the corporation," he added.