

# Explosives supply

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Naikkhongchhari border area.

An American team of firearms experts visited the remote areas of Naikkhongchhari in March 2004 and investigated the source and purpose of stockpiling the explosives.

Although the population of Naikkhongchhari, Ramu and Ukhiya areas in Cox's Bazar and Teknaf is only 40,000, there are hundreds of makhtabs and madrasas in the area, the rationale behind which has also become a puzzle to solve for the intelligence agencies.

There is an allegation that these makhtabs and madrasas are giving military training to poor and impressionable students for sending them to foreign countries to fight for "jihad". However, the intelligence agencies are not sure if any of these trained youths was involved in the recent spate of countrywide bomb blasts.

Local sources said most of the students of these institutions are not seen in the locality at present.

A source in the upazila said some local people in collusion with some foreign guerrilla groups had started manufacturing firearms at their houses at Baishari and Eidgor using lathe machines. The locals did not dare to protest against the activities of the armed cadres of foreign Islamist groups like Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), National United Front of Arakan and Arakan Army.

The source also said a rebel group of Northeast Arakan has been using these firearms for their cause.

Earlier these people used to manufacture the firearms at their homes but now they manufacture them at other places, a resident of Baishari said seeking anonymity.

A reliable source in the government said Naikkhongchhari, an upazila on the southern tip of Bandarban, is considered as a sensitive place due to its geographical location. There is a 288km border between Bangladesh and Myanmar mostly running along the length of the upazila. These bordering areas are surrounded by dense forests and mountain ranges which are being

used as safe hideouts by the terrorists.

The 30km stretch between Tombru and Baishari, the southern end of the upazila, has the Arakan province of Myanmar and the Matamuhuri Reserve Forest just across the border.

As there is no demarcation of the border, the security forces of both the countries are unable to control illegal entries. As a result, there may be a powerful network of firearms smugglers in the area, the government source said.

The locals said using the local Rakhain and Rohingya rebels, some rebel groups of China, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar might have been utilising the Naikkhongchhari border areas as a safe transit for smuggling firearms and drugs.

A local source alleged that despite the knowledge of different foreign rebel groups' presence in the area, the government for some mysterious reasons always associates only the Rohingya rebel groups with the recovered arms.

The locals also alleged that some armed Rakhain groups have also set up temporary dens here. The RSO and Arakan Rohingya Nationalist Organisation (ARNO) are more active

than the other armed groups in these areas, they said.

It was learnt on a visit to Naikkhongchhari that the number of certificate of citizenship issued from most of the unions under the upazila in recent times is larger than that of any previous time.

Local residents alleged that the certificates were issued illegally in return for a large sum of money from each applicant.

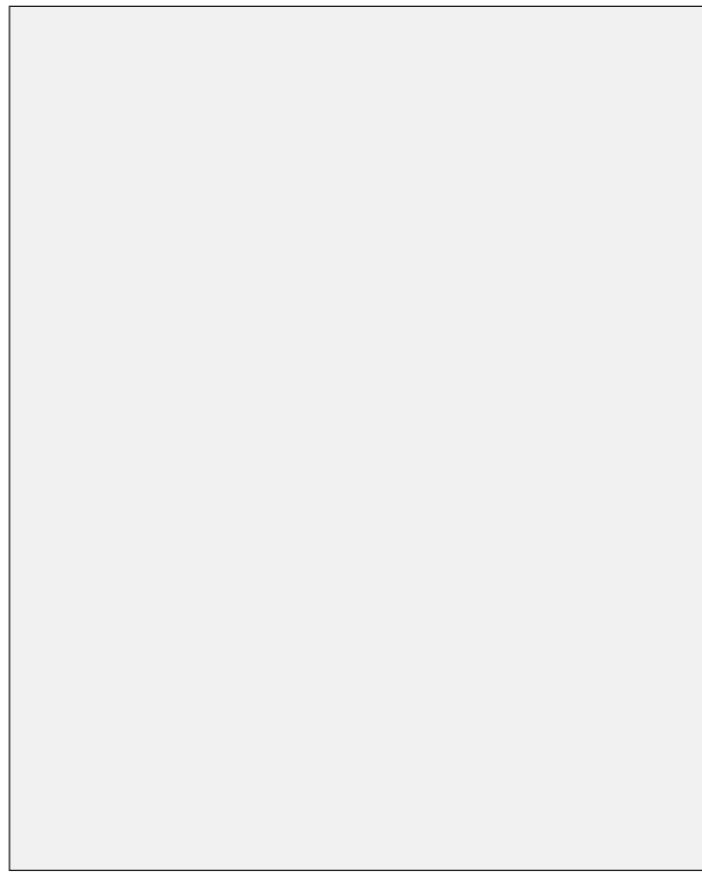
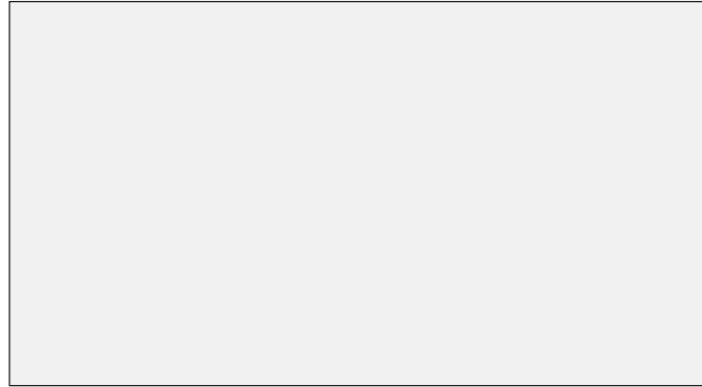
A Union Parishad chairman said many people have become interested in obtaining citizenship certificate since last August to avoid harassment.

However, no Union Parishad under Naikkhongchhari was able to provide an accurate count of certificates issued in the last few months.

Although the members of these foreign rebel groups do not carry out any terrorist activities, their presence is frightening to the people.

But despite knowing everything, the security forces have not taken any meaningful step so far to root out these terrorists.

Sources also alleged that steps are often taken against the ARNO but other organisations always go unharmed.



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