

Thai minister warns of 'more serious' attacks

AFP, Bangkok

Thai Defence Minister Boonrawd Somsat warned yesterday that the bombers behind the deadly New Year blasts in Bangkok are likely to organise even more daring attacks over the next two months.

"Those who are behind the attacks have the ability to do something even more serious," he said in an interview with AFP and a leading Thai daily, The Nation.

"The information that we have received indicates that political movements would grow and intensify their efforts to discredit the government by trying to show that we are unable to maintain domestic security," Boonrawd said.

The defence minister said he believed the masterminds of the attacks wanted to incite popular protests against the military government.

"They are trying to bring down the government with power of the people, not the gun," he said.

"They have not stopped their movements, and more actions (like the bombings) could happen again from January to March," he said without revealing why the months were considered a high-risk period.

"Political movements will intensify, not only in Bangkok. They will expand to the provinces, but I could not say in exactly what form,"

Boonrawd added.

Three people were killed and 42 wounded in eight coordinated bombings across Bangkok on New Year's Eve.

Army-installed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont has said that he believed the attacks were committed by people linked to ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, whose government was toppled by the military in September.

But Boonrawd repeated his accusation that the bombers were "men in uniform". He said while he was certain that the bombers would eventually be arrested, he was not sure if the mastermind of the attacks would ever be found.

"I am confident that we can arrest the individual bombers, but as for the person behind the attacks, that will be difficult," Boonrawd said.

The government has ruled out the possibility that the Bangkok bombings were committed by insurgents from Muslim-majority provinces in southern Thailand.

Violence in the region along the Malaysian border, where more than 1,800 people have been killed in three years of conflict, has spiked since the coup despite a number of olive branches offered by the new government.

Boonrawd said he believed the violence would ease within six months, once the government's initiatives began to bear fruit.

The military has revived a key mediation centre credited with ending earlier outbreaks of separatist violence, which have erupted periodically since the region was annexed by Thailand in 1902.

Twenty new paramilitary companies are also being recruited from the local population to help police the region, which officials hope will end complaints about patrolling troops from other parts of the country who do not speak the local dialect.

"When all of the organisations we are setting up are fully operational, the violence, the bombings, the ambushes, the arsons and the shootings will decrease," Boonrawd said.

"There will be progress within six months," he added.

The general said the government's offer to hold talks with insurgents remained open, but officials were still trying to find out who was directing the insurgency movement.

Boonrawd said the government had no plans to lift martial in the region, saying it was still needed to help soldiers in the area.

"We cannot cancel it at this time. We have to maintain it to help facilitate the work of soldiers there," he said.

Police admin remains

FROM PAGE 1 have either been made OSD (officer on special duty) or "dumped" in the Armed Police Battalion (APBn), Sardah Police Academy, Police Training Centres (PTC), training schools, Police Special Training School (PSTS), Special Branch (SB), Railway Police, riot department, and the hill tracts. In these sectors these officers will have no scope of election duty.

After curtailing the basic training programme at Sardah Police Academy in 2005, the then government shortened the six-month field-level training for assistant superintendents of police--recruited through the controversial 24th Bangladesh Civil Service examinations--to three months. The reason was to ensure that the BNP-led government could handle the posting process of these police officers within its tenure.

Unlike the previous caretaker government's moves to depoliticise the police for ensuring a free and fair election, the present CG rather promoted a few officers while conducting the eyewash reshuffle by merely sending officers from one place to another.

DRAMA IN TOP OFFICES In its first move towards the reshuffle, the CG cancelled the contractual appointments of Abdul Aziz Sarker, director general (DG) of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), and Farrukh Ahmed Chowdhury, additional inspector general (IG) of police (administration), on October 31.

Additional IG of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Khoda Bux Chowdhury was made the DG Rab on October 31. The CG made Bux the IG in two days, making the then IG Anwarul Iqbal, who is known for honesty, an OSD.

Chowdhury Kamrul Ahsan, who is senior to Bux, was made OSD on October 31 in an apparent bid to favour Bux.

Just before handing over power,

the BNP-led government sent Additional IG Sadat Hossain, who was also senior to both Chowdhury Kamrul and Khoda Bux, into forced retirement to clear Bux's way.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner SM Mizanur Rahman was made the CID chief on October 31 and Rajshahi Range DIG Naim Ahmed filled his post at 31 only to be brought back to the SP on November 19.

IN SIGNIFICANT TRANSFER OF OCs AND SPs

Khaleda Zia claimed Friday that all the SPs and OCs were changed but what she avoided in her speech is that only very few new recruits were appointed in these posts and that the same old officers only changed their offices.

The OCs were also transferred to other police stations of the same range under the same DIGs.

The changes in the posts of SP were also done as per the design of the previous government as the CG transferred many SPs from one district and metropolitan area to another. The CG, however, did not redress the cause of the deprived.

SP Abul Kalam Siddique was transferred from Shariatpur to Patuakhali, and Shahidur Rahman from Thakurgaon to Nilphamari.

Abu Naser M Khaled of Netrakona, SM Rohanuddin of Meherpur, Delwar Hossain Mia of Dinajpur, Abdullah Al Mahmud of Rajshahi, and Moshshedul Alam of Tangail were transferred to DMP as deputy commissioners (DC) on November 6.

Gazipur SP Shafiqul Islam was

made the Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) DC, and Lokman Hakim was transferred from RMP to DMP, while DMP DCs Mahbubul Alam was transferred to Rajshahi as SP, Reazul Karim to Gazipur, AKM Saidur Rahman to Bagerhat, Abu Khayer to Comilla, and Israel Hawaldar to Tangail the same day.

The transfers of assistant IG Humayun Kabir from the police headquarters to Khulna PTC, and Sardah Police Academy Principal Nazirul Rahman to Highway Police as DIG, and the swapping of Chittagong APBn commandant SM Mahfuzul Haq Nuruzzaman with AIG Banjo Kumar Majumder of the police HQ, also seem to have no major effect in terms of depoliticising the police department.

THE FAVOURED

The SPs and DCs, who were close to the BNP-led four-party alliance and enjoyed strong favour during its rule, now also have good postings.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) DC Nazmul Karim Khan, Bangladesh Agriculture University (BAU) JCU vice president and brother of former special judge and BNP candidate from Kishoreganj sadar Reazul Karim Khan Chunnu, has been made Khulna SP.

Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) DC Gazi Jasim Uddin, who was president of Patuakhali district unit Islami Chhatra Shibir, was made Sherpur SP; former JCD president of Rajshahi BIT Anwar Kamal was transferred from Faridpur to Cox's Bazar; and DMP DC Reazul Karim Mallick, who was general secretary of Amra Ziar Sainik, was transferred to Laxmipur as SP.

DMP DC Monjur Morshed Alam, also son of the nayebi amir of Jamalpur unit Jamaat, was made SP in Pabna-district of Jamaat Amir Motiur Rahman Nizami; former BAU Shibir president Munir Hossain was made SP in Netrakona, district of former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman

expressing concern over the major political parties failing to reach a consensus on an appropriate electoral process.

Owner urged political parties to avoid violence and seek ways through negotiation to ensure that interests of all Bangladeshi citizens are represented in the democratic process and free, fair and democratic elections held on schedule.

He also expressed concern that the major political parties in Bangladesh have been unable to agree on an appropriate electoral process, according to a statement made by him yesterday.

Mentioning about the announcement by Awami League and its allies that it will boycott the elections scheduled for January 22, Alexander Downer said: "Broad participation in free and fair elections is the bedrock of a democratic society."

He said: "I encourage all parties to avoid violence and to seek ways through negotiation and dialogue to ensure the interests of all Bangladeshi citizens are represented in the democratic process, and that free, fair and democratic elections are held on schedule."

Alexander Downer said Australia is assisting democracy and good governance in Bangladesh through funding for long-term capacity building projects administered by The Asia Foundation, including voter and civic education.

The Australian Electoral Commission's BRIDGE project, funded by AusAID, has provided further technical and capacity building expertise to the Bangladesh Election Commission, he said adding, "Australia will continue to monitor developments closely."

Of the 383 arrestees forwarded to the court on Sunday, 184 got release after paying the fine imposed by the court. The court sent the remaining others, implicated in regular cases, to the central jail and fixed yesterday for their bail hearings.

The 698 arrestees produced before the court on Saturday, 355 got release after paying the fine imposed by the court. The court sent the remaining others, implicated in regular cases, to the central jail and fixed yesterday for their bail hearings.

Of the 383 arrestees forwarded to the court on Sunday, 184 got release after paying the fine. The court also sent the remaining others, implicated in regular cases, to jail custody and fixed tomorrow for their bail hearings.

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