

TARGETED KILLINGS, ATTACKS A good initiative to protect people

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Amid the recent attacks and killings in the country, the superintendent of police in Magura has taken a unique initiative to protect the people in his district.

He is forming "Lathi-Bashi Defence Party" (stick-whistle defence party) in every village of the district to counter the incidents of targeted killings.

On Sunday, SP AKM Ehsan Ullah inaugurated three vigilance teams at Gobindapur, Tengarkhali in Sadar upazila and at Jaria Temple in Sreepur upazila. The team is composed of elected UP members, members of village defence party, social, political and religious leaders, traders, farmers and homemakers.

The Lathi-Bashi team will protect the people from criminals and their targeted killings and attacks, Ehsan told The Daily Star. More such teams

would be formed in each village within two or three days, he added.

Members of the group will move together and keep watch on the temples and priests. The police will help them in this regard, he added.

Arun Biswas, headmaster of Bagdanga Secondary School, said it was a good initiative. If such teams are formed and the members do their duties, the villagers would feel safer.

"We will be able to move freely without any hesitation and fear," he said.

Abdul Jalil, a villager of Gobindapur, told this correspondent that they were very happy to see such an innovative step taken by the SP.

Magura Additional SP Trikul Islam, Sadar Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Ajmal Huda, and Sreepur Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Rezaul Islam Reza, among others, were present at the inauguration.



Magura SP AKM Ehsan Ullah, who formed Lathi-Bashi vigilance team in Gobindapur, distributing whistles and sticks among villagers.

PHOTO: STAR

Lax monitoring, grave risk

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one in the port city happened as a result of using a counterfeit and faulty cylinder.

"Given the number of roadside CNG conversion shops in different parts of the city and the cheaper rates offered by them, they seem to be an obvious choice," said Quaiyum.

In recent years, unauthorised conversion centres sprouted like mushrooms in different parts of the city, particularly where the concentration of automobile outlets is high. Most of these workshops are ill- or under-equipped, and are run by mechanics with little or no expertise. They use defective cylinders and other kits, ignoring the risk factors.

In the absence of any designated monitoring authority, they even fit cars with cylinders that are not designed for containing compressed natural gas (CNG).

THE RISK
One little flaw in the cylinder, and the risk can be immense. To be sure, substandard cylinders have many flaws.

Ideally, a CNG cylinder must withstand pressure of around 3,000 pounds per square inch (PSI), which can increase further during refilling. But many of the unauthorised conversion workshops use cheap cylinders designed to contain other gases, such as oxygen. Some of them can withstand pressure between 1,000 and 1,500 PSI.

This means their chances of explosion are double, said Mohammad Ali Biswas, general manager (CNG) of Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL), the

licencing authority of CNG conversion centres.

Another common feature of CNG cylinders is that they must be seamless; no joint, no welding. But other cylinders, such as those meant for oxygen gas, tend to have a longitudinal seam that is likely to give way under high pressure.

"An investigation found that one explosion in Dhaka happened because the cylinder was made by welding metal pipes," Ali said.

Other low-quality equipment and kits used by these unauthorised workshops increase the risk further, said Farhan Noor, general secretary of Bangladesh CNG Filling Station and Conversion Workshop Owners Association, an organisation of owners of authorised filling and conversion centres.

CNG cylinders have a release valve to get rid of excess pressure inside, in case of over refilling. Unskilled mechanics, oblivious to its purpose, often shut the valve off completely raising the risk of explosions.

Md Poltu, who works at Yasin Motors CNG in the city's Dholai Khal, said: "We actually collect the CNG cylinders from old vehicles and sell them."

Four other cylinder sellers in Dholai Khal and Mirpur said the same.

In almost all the cases of CNG-related explosions, the cylinders were either not meant for CNG or they were modified and welded locally, said Ali.

But why take the risk? First of all, it's cheaper. For conversions,

unauthorised centres charge between Tk 40,000 and 45,000 a piece against Tk 65,000 and 75,000 by authorised workshops.

Masud, a car owner and driver by profession, said he installed an oxygen cylinder instead of a CNG one to save money.

Then there is the persuasion by the mechanics who somewhat compels car owners to install substandard cylinders.

The Daily Star correspondents visited about 10 workshops in Mirpur, Dholai Khal and Shajahanpur that install gas cylinders in cars. While most of them sell substandard and used cylinders, all of them sell those without any safety test. One of them was found selling oxygen cylinders instead of CNG cylinders.

One mechanic said, "Customers, looking for a bargain, often ask us to convert the vehicles ... most people don't care about the issues [safety]; they just want a better deal."

AGRICULTURE FINDING
The cylinder blast in Savar in April that left two people dead and four others injured could have been avoided had the cylinder gone through the mandatory periodic test.

The cylinder in question had been in use since 2006 without any retest. The container had corroded because of long use and several holes had surfaced on its inside wall, said Monira Yesmine of the Department of Explosives.

"Had the cylinder been tested in due time, its problem would have been detected and the accident avoided," said Monira, who investi-

gated the accident.

According to the international guidelines and a 2002 government circular, gas cylinders must undergo fitness tests every five years. But cylinders of some 1.5 lakh vehicles in the country have not been tested since their conversion into CNG years ago, officials said.

There are around 3 lakh vehicles -- private cars, buses, trucks, and of course, auto-rickshaws -- that were converted into CNG-run from some 180 authorised conversion centres. There are thousands more that were converted from unauthorised centres.

Some 15 to 20 authorised workshops currently import cylinders, which must undergo check-ups by the RPGCL and the Department of Explosives.

For the five-yearly mandatory retest, there are only 11 authorised centres in the country. Of them, only seven to eight are operational.

In Bangladesh, the use of CNG as automobile fuel started in the mid-1980s and it became popular after 2001. But fewer people are now converting their vehicles mainly due to the rising gas prices.

NO ONE TO MONITOR
Bangladesh CNG Filling Station and Conversion Workshop Owners Association submitted a proposal to the BRTA on several occasions so that car owners submit their cylinder test and conversion report as a prerequisite for obtaining fitness certificates. But the government body did not pay any heed, said Farhan Noor, general secretary of the Association.

The Association has also been urging the government, particularly the RPGCL, to take action against the unauthorised workshops for long, but in vain.

Contacted, officials of three relevant authorities shifted the blame on each other.

Nurul Islam, director (engineering) of the BRTA, said they issued fitness certificates of vehicles in line with the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1983 and Motor Vehicle Rule 1984.

"Since CNG-run vehicles were not around when the Ordinance and the Rule were formulated, these have no mention of CNG," he said, adding that, they could not deal with the issues related to CNG. But talks to amend the law are underway, he said.

Nurul said the RPGCL was responsible for matters concerning CNG.

Asked, Mohammad Ali of the RPGCL said they were empowered only to give licences to CNG conversion centres and filling stations and to oversee whether these stations and centres were following the government guidelines.

The RPGCL had nothing to do with unauthorised centres, he added.

The Department of Explosives, which gives licences to the test centres and conducts investigation after any major accidents involving CNG-run vehicles, also shrugged off its responsibility.

Its chief inspector, Shamsul Alam, said the BRTA could play a role in taking action against unauthorised conversion centres.

NITYARANJAN KILLING Another suspect held, taken on 5-day remand

STAR REPORT

Police arrested another suspect in connection with the killing of Nityaranjan Pandey, a volunteer of a Hindu ashram in Pabna, on Sunday night.

The arrestee, Abul Hashem, 40, from Hemayetpur area in Sadar upazila, is one of the key suspects in the killing, reports our Pabna correspondent, quoting police.

Hashem was placed on a five-day remand yesterday by the Pabna Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court after police produced him before the court with a 10-day remand prayer, said court sources.

Acting on a tip-off, police caught Hashem from Hemayetpur area, said Abdullah Al Hasan, officer-in-charge of Pabna Sadar Police Station.

The police official said during primary investigation, they got some information about the killing and Hashem was arrested based on that information.

He could provide them vital information about the incident, said the OC.

Hashem has stood accused in 18 cases and is also a listed criminal, the police official added.

Police detained a Shibir leader Ariful Islam, 23, from the district town in connection with the murder early Sunday. He is the general secretary of Pabna district west unit of Shibir,

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BLOGGER ANANTA MURDER Apex court cancels HC bail to suspect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday cancelled a High Court order that granted bail to alleged militant Abul Khair Rashid Ahammed in blogger Ananta Bijoy Das killing case.

The Appellate Division of the SC also ordered Abul Khair to surrender before the lower court concerned in a week.

It stayed another HC order that granted bail to alleged militant Golam Sarwar Rahat in a case filed for snatching away three convicted militants from a prison van in Mymensingh in 2014.

An apex court bench, headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, passed the orders after hearing two petitions filed by the government challenging the HC orders, Deputy Attorney General Khondker Diliruzzaman told The Daily Star.

He also said Abul Khair earlier got released from jail after the HC granted him bail, and Golam Sarwar, who is now in jail, cannot get released following the SC's stay order.

Abul Khair got bail from the HC on April 19 and Golam Sarwar on February 28.

Blogger Ananta Bijoy Das was hacked to death by a group of masked men in Sylhet city on May 12 last year.

On February 23, 2014, an armed gang ambushed a prison van and snatched away three convicted Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants -- two of them on death row -- in Trishal of Mymensingh.

A police constable was killed as the gang of 10-15, all masked, opened fire and hurled crude bombs at the prison van.

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Crackdown a money spinner for some cops

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Not surprisingly, the OC and the ASI gave contradictory statements about the arrest. Malek said they detained Milon on Saturday, but Subir Datta, the OC, said it was Sunday.

Apparently innocent, Milon is just one of the many victims of the ongoing crackdown on militants and criminals.

The nationwide clampdown began on Friday, triggering fears that innocent people might become victims of mass arrests.

It came in the wake of the brutal murder of a top police official's wife in Chittagong on June 5. Babul Akter, now an SP, is credited with arresting several top militants and busting some militant dens.

On the fourth day of the drive, as many as 3,245 people, including 34 suspected militants, were arrested. With them, the total number of arrests now stands at 8,532.

Police claim they are not arresting any innocent people, but information from the field say otherwise.

And if the drive continues, the number of arrestees will surpass any past figure, police sources said.

According to media reports, in June 2008, around 12,000 people had been detained and carted off to prison in the first eight days of a special drive against known and listed criminals during the caretaker government tenure.

And ahead of the then opposition Awami League's April 30, 2004, deadline to topple the then BNP government, more than 15,000 were picked up in an eight-day dragnet.

Asked, National Human Rights Commission Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman said many innocent men might be victims when law enforcers detained 4,000 people to arrest only 37 suspected militants.

"When this happens, our past experience says, there are chances for business [of making money] centring on these arrests. We want to ring the alarm bell so that no such incidents can take place," he said by phone.

"Detaining an innocent person is a violation of human rights in itself. Then, what can be sadder than this if they have to buy their release after making members of law enforcement agencies satisfied with money. This is not acceptable," he said.

Law enforcement agencies will detain suspects on the basis of intelligence reports. Some innocents might get caught in the process, but the state has to ensure their release at the earliest without any harassment,

DRIVE AGAINST MILITANTS

Number of arrests till Monday 6:00am

	Militants	Warranted	Illegal arms case	Narcotics case	Other cases	Total
Day-1	37	1,861	19	358	917	3,192
Day-2	48	1,496	41	391	156	2,132
Day-3	34	2,578	19	160	454	3,245
Total	119	5,935	79	909	1,527	8,569

SOURCE: POLICE HEADQUARTERS

headed.

Like Milon, police in Natore picked up a man named Babu with some others on Sunday night from Millat Hotel. He came to the town from his village home at Faridpur in Pabna to seek financial help from people for treatment of his father, a cancer patient.

His uncle Raju told this newspaper that Officer-in-charge of Natore Sadar Police Station Mizanur Rahman demanded Tk 8,000 for his release. But the OC got furious when he offered Tk 3,000.

The OC termed the allegation baseless.

Police in Chittagong raided the house of Mohammed Sekandar, 30,

a cloth trader, at Esaker Pole in Bakalia around 1:30am on Monday. They took him with them, saying the OC needs to talk to him. Later, they arrested him without showing any reason.

"My son-in-law is not involved in active politics. There has never been a case against him before. He is a simple man and makes his living by selling cloths at the shop," said Jahangir Alam.

Sekandar had gone to the United Arab Emirates and worked there for two years. On return, he started his business.

SI Mohamed Yasin of Chandgaon Police Station admitted that there was no case against Sekandar in the

past.

"But he is a Jamaat supporter," he said.

The small trader, who has two daughters and wife to provide for, has been shown arrested in three cases over last year's vandalism and arson.

Shimul Ahmed and Sohanur Rahman of Bagha in Rajshahi are fortunate to have got released from Bagha Police Station after the intervention of local AL leaders.

The two friends were sitting beside the Dighi of Bagha Shrine mosque, waiting for their Tarabi prayers on Friday.

A police team caught the two and took them to the station.

On information, locals and AL leaders rushed to the police station and challenged the cops the following noon. They had an angry argument with police officials following which the two friends were freed.

Ali Mahmud, OC of Bagha Police Station, said police caught them on suspicion. "As we later found that they were not involved in any criminal activities, we freed them."

CRACKDOWN ON 4TH DAY
Of the 34 suspected militants nabbed yesterday, 25 were members of the banned militant outfit Jama'at-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh and three each of Hizb-ut Tahrir, Ansar Al Islam and Allah'r Dal, according to the police headquarters.

Of the rest, 2,578 had arrest orders for them in various cases. Another 160 are accused in narcotics cases, 19 in illegal arms cases and 454 in other cases, according to a statement of the police HQ.

Police on the first day of the drive nabbed 3,155 and on the second day 2,132 people.

Of those arrested between Sunday morning and Monday morning, some are activists of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, report our district correspondents, citing police sources.

In Rajshahi, police arrested 108 people, including 49 from the metropolitan area. One of the arrestees is a suspected JMB operative, said police sources.

Police in Bogra nabbed 100 people, including three JMB operatives and six Jamaat-Shibir men from 12 upazilas.

In Pabna, police held 71 people, including a JMB operative, while in Satkhira 52 people, including eight Jamaat-Shibir men.

Arrests were also made in Jamalpur, Chapainawabganj, Kurigram, Sylhet, Manikganj, Nilphamari and Pirojpur.

Assam facing huge threat of unchecked infiltration

Says BJP resolution

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party yesterday alleged that northeastern Indian state of Assam faced "a Himalayan threat of demographic invasion due to unchecked infiltration from Bangladesh."

A resolution at a meeting of the party's highest policymaking forum the National Executive in Allahabad said, "An important issue for Assam -- the problem of underdevelopment -- is the threat of demographic invasion the state has faced from an unchecked infiltration from neighbouring Bangladesh for decades on."

"It has reached Himalayan proportions and signalled a death-knell to Assam's identity, culture and traditions besides severely affecting state's economy and people's livelihood. Successive governments have turned a blind eye to this problem with an eye on their vote banks. The then ruling Party (Congress) in the state and its chief minister have gone to the ridiculous extent of denying the existence of even a single infiltrator in the state," the resolution said.

The BJP, which was voted to power in recent elections to the Assam assembly, said it had gone to the people promising them "freedom from security from infiltrators" and their champions and apologists and people gave a wholehearted mandate in its favour.

That is why the National Executive does not look at the victory in the Assembly elections as just another electoral victory alone and "signifies a major ideological victory for the party."

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