

No lapse in security

CEC says about Monday's killing in Rangamati's Baghaichhari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday claimed there was no lack of security in Rangamati's Baghaichhari upazila where seven people, including two polling officials, were killed in a shooting on Monday.

The attack was a "pre planned and clandestine one," he added.

Talking to the reporters at Chattogram Circuit House, he said, members of Border Guard Bangladesh, Rapid Action Battalion and Army were deployed in the region.

The protection jeep of BGB could not turn back during the attack as the road of the area was too narrow, he added.

"The perpetrators were hiding there to take advantage of the narrow road and fled the scene after firing," Nurul Huda said.

After visiting the injured victims of the incident at Combined Military Hospital in Chattogram, the CEC said they were yet to know the reason behind the attack.

"The commission has asked the police to launch investigation, identify the killers and bring them to book as early as possible," he added.

Saying several policemen also sustained bullet injuries, CEC Huda promised financial assistance to the victims

that would bear the medical cost of the victims.

In the second phase of upazila polls on Monday, two jeeps, carrying polling officials and materials, came under attack in Noymile area of Rangamati's Baghaichhari upazila around 6:00pm.

The jeeps were returning to Baghaichhari town with election results from Konglak Government Primary School centres in Sajek union.

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukder said the attack was "the most fatal in the history of the commission".

He said an investigation would be carried out to know who were behind the attack.

"I instantly cannot say who are responsible for the attack and its reason," he wrote in a statement at his Nirbachon Bhaban office.

Any comments regarding the reason and who are responsible for the attack can derail the normal investigation path, said Mahbub, who visited the victims of the shooting at Dhaka CMH on the day of the attack.

"This is a cowardly attack," he said, adding, "I do not have any words to condemn the attack".

The commission would take its next course of action after CEC Huda returns from Chattogram, Mahbub said at the

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TOUR TO AUSTRALIA, NZ
Bangladesh issues travel advisories for its citizens

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has issued separate travel advisories warning for citizens traveling to Australia and New Zealand following the March 15 terror attacks in Christchurch that left five Bangladeshi origins brutally killed and three others injured.

"Further attacks in public places targeting foreigners are possible. Muslims and migrants from Bangladesh are advised to be vigilant at all times. We recommend exercising caution around potential attack targets such as mosques," reads the travel advice for New Zealand issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday.

The Bangladesh nationals living in Australia and the Bangladesh nationals travelling to Australia are advised to be vigilant at all times, particularly in public places," according to the travel advice for Australia.

An Australian named Brenton Tarrant has been charged with killing 50 people and injuring 48 others in gun attacks on worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

He has been alleged as a "White Supremacist". Before perpetrating the

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died in 2,562 accidents in 2017.

The figures are significantly lower than that of two road-safety organisations but even with these figures, it would be impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to halve the number of deaths on roads by next year, experts and road safety campaigners said.

They said apart from proper enforcement of laws, more measures were required to achieve the SDG. All member states of the United Nations adopted the SDG in 2015.

Police prepared their stats with information from cases filed after accidents. The two road-safety organisations' annual accident reports are based on media reports.

Nirapad Sarak Chai said 4,439 people were killed in 3,103 road crashes last year while Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity said 7,221 people were killed in 5,514 road crashes.

Experts and activists said the actual number of road crashes and casualties would be much higher than the police figure. They said many accidents go unreported by the media as well.

Tens of thousands of students took to the street demanding road safety following the deaths of two college students in a road accident in the capital on July 29 last year.

The movement forced the government to take several steps to curb road accidents. Even, the Prime Minister's Office intervened and issued a number

of directives.

In late August, it asked the authorities to make sure that bus passengers are picked up and dropped off only at bus stops and the doors of buses are kept closed when they are running.

It said photos of the driver and his helper must be kept at two visible places in buses.

The PMO recommended introducing remote-controlled traffic signalling system in the capital.

Dhaka Road Transport Owners Association had also decided to abolish the system of daily contracts with drivers and their helpers to stop buses racing on streets.

Road Transport Act-2018 was passed in parliament in September but it is yet to be made effective.

WHY IT'S RISING?

Experts and road-safety campaigners said the numbers of accident and casualties were on the rise in absence of a comprehensive action plan to curb road crashes.

They said most of the steps taken by the authorities were related to enforcement of law but road safety cannot be ensured only by enforcing law.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, director of Accident Research Institute at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said every country goes through a certain stage when road crashes rise. It was related to development, he said.

Japan witnessed around 16,000 deaths annually in the 70's when development activities hit its peak there but

ROAD ACCIDENTS AND CASUALTIES

Year	Number of Accidents	Deaths	Injured
2018	2,609	2,635	1,920
2017	2,562	2,513	1,898
2016	2,566	2,463	2,134
2015	2,394	2,376	1,958

SOURCE: BANGLADESH POLICE

they had taken many counter measures and succeeded in bringing down the number below 3,000 in 2017, he said.

"It won't be wise to think we will be able to bring down the number to 1,000 within a year or two. However, the steps taken by the authorities to curb accidents are not sufficient," he said.

The expert mentioned six Es (Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Environment, Encouragement and Evaluation) to ensure safe road.

Engineering refers to road design and related issues; education about usages of roads and traffic rules; enforcement of relevant laws; road side environment; encouraging people about traffic rules and safe usages of road; and evaluation of the measures taken by the authorities and rectify those, he said.

"If you want to ensure safe roads, you have to implement the six Es. Road safety could not be ensured only by enforcing laws," he said.

Eminent economist Hossain Zillur said the authorities have taken many

steps to curb accidents but those steps cannot yield expected results due to lack of coordination.

The government's high-ups might want to bring positive changes but a lack of accountability among the implementing authorities and a vested interest group are hindering large reforms, said Zillur, also the convener of Safe Road and Transport Alliance (Srota).

"Leaders of transport owners and workers, who have political clout, are creating obstacles to initiatives for reforms and thus the number of accidents can't be curbed," said the former adviser to a caretaker government.

He also blamed road users' lack of awareness as a major reason behind accidents.

LAGGING BEHIND

Prof Mizanur said to achieve the SDG target, the government has to cut the number of deaths reported in 2016 by 50 percent by next year.

At least 2,463 people were killed in 2,566 crashes in 2016, according to police statistics.

"But, given the present road network and safety measures, it is almost impossible to bring down deaths to 1,200 a year...," Prof Mizanur said.

"More measures have to be taken...," he told The Daily Star on March 9.

Zillur said, "Road accidents are on the rise instead of coming down, meaning we are walking on the wrong path with regards to achieving the SDG target."

HIGHWAY ACCIDENTS DECLINE

The number of road crashes and casual-

ties has declined on national highways in the last three years, Deputy Inspector General (highway police) Atiqul Islam said.

At a programme on March 9, Atiqul said 70 percent accidents used to be on highways.

"But in the last two years, we have recorded all accidents and have taken measures. As a result, accidents decreased on highways even though the number of accidents overall has increased," he claimed.

At least 1,439 people were killed in 1,189 crashes on highways last year while 1,769 people had been killed in 1,810 crashes in 2016, according to the police.

The highway police, established in 2005, have jurisdiction over 3,812 km of national highways.

Nazrul Islam, secretary of road transport and highway division, told The Daily Star on March 11, "I don't think accident rate has increased. I don't think anything abnormal has taken place here."

Around 15 lakh vehicles have increased since 2015 and thus human mobility also increased, he said, adding, "So, you have to consider the increasing number of vehicles while counting the accidents."

About the SDG target, the secretary said, "We think we are near the target."

Nazrul said a committee, led by former shipping minister Shahjahan Khan, has been formed to recommend measures to curb road accidents and the ministry would take actions following its suggestions.

Bangabandhu

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Khan began and it lasted for two hours. The meeting was held under intense military security.

Bangabandhu was joined by his colleagues -- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed, M Mansur Ali and Kamal Hossain.

The meeting began with a heated debate where Bangabandhu brought up the military attack on civilians in Joydebpur. Yahya claimed it was the Bangalees' fault that the attack took place, because they had blocked the movement of troops.

In his response, Bangabandhu suggested that, in such a volatile time, the army must stay in their barracks.

Yahya then changed the topic and said

he wanted a solution to the problem, ignoring Bangabandhu's suggestion and tone. He also asked to invite People's Party leader, ZA Bhutto, to Dhaka.

But Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was adamant about not wanting to negotiate with Bhutto.

While the meetings took place, Bangladeshis, hungry for freedom, continued to bring out processions in the capital and all the processions were headed towards Bangabandhu's Residence at Dhanmondi.

Bangabandhu didn't fail to address them, saying that there is no force in the world that can stop seven and half crore Bangladeshis from achieving their freedom, from achieving their independent Bangladesh.

[Source: Liberation War Museum]

over and the road to the canyon was re-opened.

And people were streaming in again. Young and old visitors to the Lake Elsinore area seemed equally enchanted as they snapped selfies against the natural carpet of iridescent orange.

Some contacted friends and family on video calls so they could share the beauty in real time. Artists propped canvasses on the side of the trail to paint the super bloom, while drones buzzed overhead.

Patty Bishop, 48, of nearby Lake Forest, was on her second visit. The native Californian had never seen such an explosion of colour from the state flower. She battled traffic Sunday but that didn't deter her from going back Monday for another look. She got there at sunrise and stayed for hours.

"There's been so many in just one area," she said. "I think that's probably the main reason why I'm out here personally is because it's so beautiful."

By Monday the #poppyshtdown announced by the city on Twitter was



Blocking the Pragati Sarani in the city's Nodda area, students chant slogans demanding justice for the death of a university student in a road accident there yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

poisons the wildflowers and she slips into a fatal slumber until the good witch reverses the spell.

Lake Elsinore had tried to prepare for the crush of people drawn by the super bloom, a rare occurrence that usually happens about once a decade because it requires a wet winter and warm temperatures that stay above freezing.

It offered a free shuttle service to the top viewing spots, but it wasn't enough.

Sunday traffic got so bad that Lake Elsinore officials requested law enforcement assistance from neighbouring jurisdictions. At one point, the city pulled down the curtain and closed access to poppy-blanketed Walker Canyon.

"It was insane, absolutely insane," said Mayor Steve Manos, who described it as a "poppy apocalypse."

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Student's blood stains road again

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Police and fellow students said Abrar was crossing the road through the zebra crossing to catch a bus for his university around 7:30am. He was crushed under the wheels of a bus racing with another, according to witnesses.

He died on the spot. In a photo obtained by The Daily Star, the body was lying some three yards off the zebra crossing.

Police arrested the driver, Sirajul Islam, and seized the Suprohbat Paribahan bus that was involved in the accident and plied Gulistan-Gazipur route. Later, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority yesterday suspended its registration.

"The registration of the bus -- Dhaka Metro-Ba-11-4135 -- has been suspended under section 43 of Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1983," reads a letter signed by Rafiqul Islam, assistant director of BRTA.

As the news of his death spread, students of different educational institutions took to the streets and kept the busy Pragati Sarani blocked for over 10 hours. The area reverberated with the slogan "We want justice" until the students left the road around 6:00pm.

Visiting the spot, this correspondent saw the white stripes of the zebra crossing stained with blood. Students cordoned off the area with some of them lying on the street.

One of them was holding a placard that read, "Wait for your turn."

"Who is next?" read another. Another student was seen lying on the street wearing a white shirt smeared with blood-red colour protesting Abrar's death.

Abrar was vocal during last year's massive student agitations following the death of two college students in a road accident in the capital's Sherwra on July 29, just a few kilometres off yesterday's place of accident.

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