

# India, Pakistan trade border fire

Two dead, including young girl, in shelling

AFP, Srinagar

India and Pakistan yesterday exchanged fire across the border in Kashmir, officials said, killing a young girl and a soldier in just the latest bloodshed in the restive mountainous region.

A five-year-old girl died after a mortar bomb landed near her home in Poonch, a district on the Indian side of the frontier that sees heavy shelling between the nuclear-armed rivals.

A spokesman for India's Border Security Force, which patrols the heavily militarised frontier, said one of their troops was also killed and three others wounded in the day's barrage.

Indian forces returned fire along the de facto border after Pakistan began shelling in the morning, army spokesman Lt Colonel Devender Anand said.

The two sides agreed in 2003 to a ceasefire along the so-called "Line of Control" that divides Kashmir into zones of Indian and Pakistani control.

But the agreement is frequently violated and civilians on both sides are often caught up in the crossfire.

The deaths in Poonch came just hours after four armed men were killed in a firefight with government forces in Pulwama, a district 140 kilometres (87 miles) to the east, closer to the main city of Srinagar.

Police said one of their officers was

injured, along with three soldiers, in the shootout with gunmen they described as militants.

Such violence between armed groups resisting Indian rule and government troops is not uncommon in Kashmir.

But the region has been particularly bloody this year, with at least 162 people killed between January and March -- including 21 civilians.

Over the same period in 2018, 119 people had died. Last year was the bloodiest year in almost a decade.

In February, at least 40 paramilitary troops were killed in a suicide bombing. New Delhi, which blamed Pakistan for supporting the militants behind the blast, launched retaliatory air raids inside Pakistani territory for the first time in decades.

Tensions escalated as Pakistani and Indian jets fought over the skies in Kashmir. The situation calmed down when an Indian pilot, who was captured in the dogfight, was returned by Pakistan, which denied supporting the militants.

But both sides have shelled across the border in Kashmir since, sending residents fleeing.

Kashmir has been divided since the end of British colonial rule in 1947 and both New Delhi and Islamabad claim the former Himalayan kingdom in full.

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Hasnain Ahmed Ripon, right, a survivor of the FR Tower blaze, visits the spot along with others yesterday. He shared his horrifying experience with The Daily Star on camera.

PHOTO: STAR

## 'Gang rape' again

FROM PAGE 1

"During the polling hours on Sunday, a group of supporters of vice chairman candidate Farhad Hossain Chowdhury Bahar threatened me and my husband with dire consequences as we campaigned for his rival candidate Tajuddin Babar."

Fearing an attack, the couple took shelter at a relative's house in Bagga village after casting their votes.

But they became worried about their children as a storm hit the village in the evening. The couple decided to go home, about five kilometres away from there, on a motor-bike.

As they travelled around half of the distance, 10-12 supporters of vice-chairman candidate Farhad, including Yusuf Majhi, Arman, Helal, Bechu Majhi, Fazal, Abul Bashar, Rubel, Bazlu and Raihan, intercepted them around 7:30pm and beat them severely, the couple alleged.

At one stage, Bechu Majhi, Bazlu and Abul Bashar took the victim to a banana orchard inside the fish farm of Ruhul Amin, the alleged mastermind behind the gang-rape of the mother of four, and violated her.

Hearing screams for help, locals rushed to the spot and sent the victim to Noakhali General Hospital. The "rapists" managed to escape.

Farhad and Tajuddin, both supporters of ruling Awami League, said

the rapists were criminals and didn't belong to any political party.

Claiming that the woman was violated for voting for him, Tajuddin demanded exemplary punishments for the rapists.

Farhad, winner of the Sunday's polls, had contested with the electoral symbol "padlock" while his contender Tajuddin with "spectacle".

Syed Mohiuddin Azim, resident physician of Noakhali General Hospital, said the woman and her husband were admitted to the hospital.

The women's body bore injury marks and a medical test would be conducted on her to ascertain whether she was raped, he added.

Police later visited the spot.

Shahed Uddin, OC of Char Jabbar Police Station, claimed the gang rape had no links with the polls. "We have learned primarily that the incident took place over a family feud."

According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a total of 189 women and children were raped in the last three months. Of them, 15 were killed and three others died by suicide after being raped.

The rights body in its report, published on Sunday, also said 34 women became victim of attempted rape during the same period.

## Planning goes haywire

FROM PAGE 1

The non-restricted Floor Area Ratio will allow land owners to have commercial high-rises on residential plots.

The move will damage the fabric of the residential neighbourhoods; traffic system would collapse on thoroughfares of Gulshan and Banani; and drainage, water supply, electricity, and gas supply facilities will fall short, according to leading architects and urban planners.

Rajuk's action has no planning or impact assessment, they said, adding that Rajuk could have done it declaring the entire area commercial but such an action would have had to be in compliance with the basic benchmarks of urban planning and based on findings of an impact assessment.

Provision 51 (13) of the building construction rules says, in case of conversion of original land use, the permissible built-up floor area would be the smaller of the two -- the original land use and the converted land use.

In this case, it is the permissible floor area of residential plots but Rajuk is allowing built-up floor area for commercial plots.

"Such arbitrary commercialisation in violation of the law is just one classic example of how the custodian has done irreparable damage to the capital city's sustainable development," said former Institute of

Architects Bangladesh president Prof Abu Sayeed M Ahmed.

It is aimed at benefiting some individual businessmen at a very high public cost, he said.

This surely is going to drastically harm the quality of life in Gulshan and Banani with unmanageable traffic jams, he said, adding that Gulshan and Kemal Ataturk avenues are already choking on heavy traffic.

Khondker M Ansar Hossain, who was a senior urban planner for Dhaka's Detailed Area Plan, said, "In the first place, it is not understandable how Rajuk converted designated residential land into commercial, let alone how they allowed non-restricted floor area ratio."

"This arbitrary commercialisation without planning is what led to today's deplorable traffic mess and unplanned urbanisation in Dhaka city and in this case, it will cause the collapse [of traffic system] on the arterial roads in Gulshan and Banani," he said.

The use restrictions on a certain piece of land can be changed only for greater public interest and on the basis of a thorough study, said Khondker.

The entire approval process in this case must be examined independently by professionals, suggested Prof Adil Mohammed Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners.

Rajuk's Chief Town Planner Md Sirajul Islam said, "There was a ministerial direction for this action and we did it on being directed."

When asked if there was any legal basis for the decision, he asked this correspondent to talk to the Rajuk chairman.

Rajuk Chairman Md Abdur Rahman said, "I don't understand land use conversion, we did it considering the land as commercial following relevant rules."

Asked exactly what the rule was, he said, "We did it thoughtfully, as the government thought it was appropriate."

WHAT IT MEANS

According to rules, the architects calculated that an owner of an one-bigha residential plot (equivalent to 14,400 sqft) would get a total of 93,600 sqft of floor space with a 13-storey building, if the maximum allowable ground coverage of the land (7,200 sqft) is utilised.

But if no height limits are applicable, a land owner gets an additional floor area of 86,400 sqft, if a 25-storey building is built.

However, some of the land owners are set to construct 30-storey buildings.

The value of the additional floor space, if sold for Tk 15,000 per sqft and the construction cost is deducted, would be Tk 130 crore, officials concerned said.

## Introduce

FROM PAGE 1

The fire service officials have been visiting industries and factories to issue annual safety clearance and the PM wants to introduce the system for all high-rises, Shaful said.

Hasina also asked the authorities concerned to inspect the sites where buildings would be constructed and evaluate the viability of the projects.

The department has only three such ladders.

Many offices are using automatic doors that usually do not work during an electricity failure, she pointed out. Make the doors manually workable when there is no power, she said.

### KEY INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE PM

- Firefighters should inspect high-rises and issue annual fire safety certificates
- Water reservoirs and water bodies should be created and Dhaka's lakes preserved
- Building owners should arrange fire drills every three months
- Shun electric doors that do not work during an electricity failure
- Have at least two emergency exits at each high-rise
- Fire service should increase its number of ladders to tackle fires at high-rises
- Adopt techniques to control smoke during a fire
- Design buildings considering the environment and fire safety
- Have veranda at every school and hospital and ensure that the verandas remain open at all times



A teacher provides positive reinforcement for Hridoy Khan, a six-year-old autistic child, at Anandashala on the campus of Jahangirnagar University. Running for 10 years, the school for children with special needs now has 20 students. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: STAR

## The school of joy

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Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physiotherapists.

Associate Prof Sharmin Neelormi of Economics, who also helped establish the school, said, "We started the awareness initiatives among the teachers and students of the university in early 2006.

Later, in association of CDD, the university authorities began the school in 2009 at the JU Central Students' Union building with three rooms.

"I thought the university will be best places to set up the school as most people here are aware and sensible."

Mamunur Rashid, teacher in charge of the school, said, "It's a great news for us that we have been able to transfer 3 to 4 students to regular schools, where they are performing well, both academically and psychologically."

On dealing with children with varying degrees of autism in their classrooms, he said, "It is all about

individual attention. Every student has to have an individual lesson plan."

Meanwhile, Prof Hanif Ali of Computer Science and Engineering department at JU, who is the honorary director of Anandashala, said Dhaka District Parishad Chairman Mahbubur Rahman has already allotted around Tk 22 lakh for infrastructure development for these special children.

"We have already tested the soil to set up a school building," he added.

## Vital project sees

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He was, however, hopeful of getting the equipment soon.

Officials concerned said they believe the procurement process would gather momentum now.

The capital witnessed several deadly fires in quick succession. Two disasters in February and March claimed nearly 100 lives.

MODERNISATION IN OFFING

The officials said with a loan from the World Bank, they were in the process of getting three turntable ladders that could go up to 26-storeys high.

Lt Col Zulfiker said, "We have also taken initiative to establish 11 modern fire service and civil defence stations."

The stations would be in industrial areas such as Gazipur, Ashulia, Narayanganj, Dhaka, Chattogram, Cox's Bazaar, and at the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Pabna.

Officials said the fire department plans to take up a Tk 2,500 crore project as part of its second-phase of modernisation efforts.

It wants to buy 85 types of firefighting and rescue equipment, including 25 turntable ladders, 25 fire snorkels, 25 combo vehicles, and 50 water tenders.

TRAINING, RULES, HYDRANTS

Analysts said just strengthening the fire brigade would not do.

Lives and properties will still be in danger unless enforcement of the national building code is ensured, awareness is raised and trainings are imparted.

They said measures like installing fire hydrants in cities must be taken.

"Structures have been built filling up ponds and water bodies. Where will firefighters get water if there is no fire hydrant available?" said Mohammad Abu Sadek, former director of Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI).

He said even if the capacity of the BFSCD was enhanced several times and millions were spent on equipment, there could be little to show for.

"You can reduce risk of fire incidents by ensuring national building code compliance, creating awareness, and training people. People do not know what to do [in case of a fire incident], how to use the fire extinguishers. There are no fire drills. There are no evacuation plans in buildings and there are no initiatives for these," he said.

Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, project director of Bangladesh Network Office for Urban Safety (BNUS) of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), said many city areas have problems, including lack of fire hydrants, fire safety measures in buildings, and fire stations being far away.

He said the Dhaka Water Supply & Sewerage Authority has to install fire hydrants.

"If we have the mentality that the fire service will douse fires, it will not do. Training people building by building, training the local community as well as ensuring fire-fighting equipment availability is required," he said.

BFSCD Director General Brig Gen Md Sazzad Hussain said the number of equipment the agency currently has was not too small to fight fires.

"We have taken steps for modernisation," he said.

He pointed out problems the firemen face on a regular basis -- traffic jams and narrow streets and lanes. "This impedes our work," he said, adding, "We are procuring small tenders considering the size of streets as large vehicles cannot reach all spots."

Fire stations are being established in every upazila, said the fire chief.

BFSCD has more than 400 stations across the country.

High-rise buildings should have a rampaulin that can be used as emergency exit.

Earlier, the cabinet adopted a condolence motion at the loss of lives and property in the recent devastating fire at FR Tower.

The Cabinet also approved in principle the Habiganj Agriculture University Act, 2019 and Gazipur Development Authority Act, 2019.

Two days after the Banani fire, DNCC kitchen market in Gulshan was devastated by a fire.

Following the incident, Housing and Public Works Minister SM Rezaul Karim

## Cop closed

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awarded for filing the most traffic rules violation cases in the east division of DMP.

He stopped Shahin Ahmed's bike yesterday morning. Shahin's pillion rider was holding a wet helmet instead of putting it on.

In a Facebook post, Shahin said, "... the traffic sergeant stopped us near the police box, checked all related documents, but fined me for carrying a passenger without a helmet.

"As I protested, he started slapping and punching me. At one point, he took me inside the police box and beat me up there too..." Shahin alleged in the post.

Talking to The Daily Star, traffic sergeant Sohel claimed that Shahin first hurled abuse at him and had shoved him.

"Then I lost my temper..." Sohel said, adding that the video shot by another biker did not show the complete picture.

The video made rounds in Facebook, drawing flak from netizens.

Many criticised the sergeant for "his unprofessional demeanour" and demanded his punishment.