



A member of a bomb disposal team works to defuse an improvised explosive device in Lalitpur, Nepal yesterday. Nepalese police arrested 13 suspected Maoist activists after three deadly bomb blasts in Kathmandu killed four people and injured seven others on Sunday night.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## City traffic in disorder

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The thoroughfares take thousands to and from work every day.

"The situation for pedestrians at Shahbagh intersection is awful and perilous, with the footbridge dismantled, battered pavements and the main road blocked with barrier. Only a narrow lane for motor vehicles is left," Shahana Akhtar, an attendant to a patient at BSMMU, said recently.

Shariful Hasan, who commutes from Mirpur, said streets in Mirpur, from Pallabi to Agargaon, has been in deplorable condition over the last couple of years as the construction work is going on there.

Whatever road space is left for traffic is in tatters, pothole riddled, muddy or covered in thick layer of dust that get kicked up, he said.

Commuters have to deal with dust pollution and standstill traffic every day. On top of this, drainage system often stops working, submerging the streets and leaving them mucky afterwards, he said.

"The situation is such that it takes me two and half hours at midnight, when city streets are supposed to be almost empty, to get to Mirpur-10 roundabout from Farmgate on motorbike," said Hasan.

For Dhaka Traffic Division, just keeping the traffic moving became its biggest challenge. The city traffic authority is disappointed as most of its recommendations for easing people's movement went unheeded by the DMTCL authorities.

Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, joint commissioner for North Dhaka Traffic Division, said during a meeting of the metro rail project's 20-member traffic management committee a couple of months ago, they again asked for road widening by reducing the width of the pavements and removing electric poles.

"They [DMTCL] are not doing it, so we said they have to first do it and then they would take up the road space [for construction], but they have taken the road width without widening the remaining active lanes," he said.

Apart from this, diversions need to be made and parallel, adjoining, and feeder roads have to be repaired. When traffic is diverted, those roads have to be improved for dealing with the additional pressure. "They are not doing it in an organised way either," he said.

"Either they [DMTCL] don't understand traffic management or are not able to execute it accordingly," said Mosleh Uddin.

"We told them that they have to prepare the roads where they intend to

divert traffic from the main corridor. It also requires a lot of additional manpower. But they are not doing the job accordingly and only they know why," he said.

They seem to think that they would just take up the road width for the construction work and police would deal with the traffic mess, he said.

"How can police do it unless they provide the police with engineering solutions? Coordination with police is vital. They have to do the traffic management like the way we want or people will suffer."

If it is not done in time or as desired, the people will suffer, he added.

Mosleh Uddin's counterpart in DMP South, Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, said traffic police made a set of recommendations to the project authority and also shared those with all relevant authorities, including the "highest level" of the government, last October.

He said they had recommended keeping the roads and pavements useable and clean, ensuring good environment, and making sure people and traffic are able to move smoothly in key spots before the DMTCL embarked on the construction work.

Asked if the metro rail authorities had taken measures accordingly, he said, "In some cases only."

Mofiz said they wanted the metro rail authorities to issue regular public notices on how to use the adjoining roads, on diversions, and management plans.

Prof Shamsul Hoque, a transport expert and independent member of the metro rail's traffic management committee, said he had no idea about the traffic management plan taken up by the authorities as he had not been invited to committee meetings in the last three years.

All over the world, metro rail schemes are implemented with relevant professionals in a responsible way and giving the highest priority to people's ease of movement, safety, and environment conservation, said Prof Hoque.

"The project authorities were supposed to give priority to mass transportation modes, like double-deckers and other buses and restricting small vehicles like cars, three- or two-wheelers along the project corridor. But the situation is opposite here," said Prof Hoque.

Millions of pedestrians are the worst victims of this traffic mismanagement and they are most vulnerable to accidents as well, Prof Hoque added.

He feared that roads near proposed

metro stations would be significantly choked and horrific traffic jams would be triggered. The situation would be extremely difficult at Sonargaon intersection because the work has to go on keeping the Saarc fountain intact.

Moazzem Hossain, a transport expert and professor of civil engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said, "Public suffering would have been minimal had components of the structure been pre-fabricated off site and assembled on site later."

They are trying to do everything at the site, apparently to save cost, he claimed.

This paper repeatedly sought comments from the metro rail implementing company, DMTCL.

Metro rail line-6 Project Director Md Aftabuddin Talukder, who is also the convener of the 20-member traffic management committee, and Managing Director MAN Siddique were reached out to via text messages.

None responded.

The Daily Star correspondent then contacted Siddique's office several times but was told the MD was busy. This correspondent was directed to the public relations officer of the company Khan Md Mizanul Islam who advised going to the MD's office in person.

This correspondent along with a photojournalist then went to the DMTCL office but was not allowed to meet the MD or get an appointment.

On May 6 and May 8, The Daily Star contacted the MD's office again but was told on both occasions that he was busy and the message could not be conveyed.

Asked about traffic management measures taken, Khandakar Rakibur Rahman, executive director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority, said, "Why should we tell you that?"

"Police and DMTCL manage the traffic the way they can and they are supposed to tell you about it," said Rakibur, when pointed out that he leads the transport coordination authority in the capital.

The 20-member traffic management committee was formed in November 2015 comprising representatives from Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority, traffic police, the project consultant, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, other authorities, and an independent expert.

The construction work is scheduled to complete by June 2024 but the government wants it done by the end of 2022.

## Myanmar frees

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Prison, and a senior prison official in the capital, Naypyitaw, confirmed that the convicted soldiers had not been in prison for some months.

"Their punishment was reduced by the military," said the senior Naypyitaw official, who declined to be named.

Both prison officials declined to provide further details and said they did not know the exact date of the release, which was not announced publicly.

Military spokesmen Zaw Min Tun and Tun Tun Nyi declined to comment.

The seven soldiers were the only security personnel the military has said it has punished over the 2017 operation in Rakhine, which

drove more than 730,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh. UN investigators said the crackdown was executed with "genocidal intent" and included mass killings, gang rapes and widespread arson.

Myanmar denies widespread wrongdoing and officials have pointed to the jailing of the seven soldiers in the Inn Din case as evidence Myanmar security forces do not enjoy impunity.

"I would say that we took action against every case we could investigate," the military's commander in chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, told officials from the UN. Security Council in April last year, according to an account posted on his personal website.

The army chief cited the Inn Din case specifically. "The latest crime we punished was a killing, and ten years' imprisonment was given to seven perpetrators," he said. "We will not forgive anyone if they commit (a) crime."

Reached by phone on Thursday, a man named Zin Paing Soe confirmed that he was one of the seven soldiers and that he was now free, but declined to comment further. "We were told to shut up," he said.

The 2017 campaign was launched across hundreds of villages in northern Rakhine in response to attacks by Rohingya insurgents. Reuters exposed the killings in a report published in February 2018.

## Four killed

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general strike to protest against the death of one of its leaders in police custody.

Police said at least 13 officials from the Maoist group had been arrested on Sunday night and early yesterday in different parts of the country.

"Security agencies dealt with suspicious objects found in different areas, mostly outside the capital," said police spokesman Bishwa Raj Pokharel.

While some schools and offices remained closed in Kathmandu, "the effect of the general strike is nominal in the Kathmandu valley but very few vehicles are working outside the capital," the spokesman added.

Four men were killed and seven people injured in three explosions in Kathmandu on Sunday.

A blast inside a shop killed three people, one died in an explosion at a nearby house, whilst two men carrying explosives on a motorbike were among those injured.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but police said they suspected the Maoist group whose pamphlets were found in a house where one of the explosions took place.

Nepal has enjoyed relative calm since the end of a decade-long civil war in 2006. But some former guerrillas have formed a new group accusing their former leaders of betraying their revolutionary cause.

The group was banned after it was implicated in an explosion that killed one person outside a telecom company office in February.

## One arrested

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investigation.

Police also detained Tanvir's wife and mother for interrogation.

Sajida Sultana, sister of the victim, told The Daily Star that Abida came to their house in Beanibazar upazila on Friday.

On Sunday morning, Abida told her that she urgently needed to visit their Barlekha house and from there she would go to her home in Moulvibazar town, Sajida said.

Abida was the eldest among the three siblings and used to collect the rent of their house that was rented out to Tanvir's family, Sajida said, adding that there was also a room in the house only for their family members.

"I called Abida in the afternoon just to check if she had reached home safely but found her phone was switched off."

"Later, we went to our Barlekha house and found that our room was locked from outside. We then informed the police and they recovered the body," said the mourning sister.

OC Yasin said they had sent the body to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

A team of Police Bureau of Investigation visited the spot, the OC added.

Meanwhile, Moulvibazar Bar Association held several protest programmes in the city seeking justice for Abida.

## Russia launches

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nuclear energy corporation Rosatom in 2022, when the other two icebreakers – the Arktika and the Sibir – also enter service.

The Arktika was floated in 2016.

"The Urals together with its sisters are central to our strategic project of opening the NSR to all-year activity," Alexey Likhachev, Rosatom's chief executive, was quoted saying.

President Vladimir Putin said in April Russia was stepping up construction of icebreakers with the aim of significantly boosting freight traffic along its Arctic coast.

The drive is part of a push to strengthen Moscow's hand in the high north as it vies for dominance with traditional rivals Canada, the United States and Norway, as well as China.

By 2035, Putin said Russia's Arctic fleet would operate at least 13 heavy-duty icebreakers, nine of which would be powered by nuclear reactors.

The Arctic holds oil and gas reserves equivalent to 412 billion barrels of oil, about 22 percent of the world's undiscovered oil and gas, the US Geological Survey estimates.

Moscow hopes the route which runs from Murmansk to the Bering Strait near Alaska could become increasingly popular as it cuts sea transport times from Asia to Europe.

Levels of sea ice have consistently declined in the Arctic – the part of the world most rapidly warming.

The 5.04 million sq miles of ice in the Arctic was 525,000 sq miles below the 1981-to-2010 ice cover average, making January 2019 the lowest on record, according to the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSIDC).

## Conflicting claims

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Not only that, Bilaichhari upazila Awami League President Suresh Kanti Tanchangya, 45, was killed a day after the Baghaichhari attack.

The killings, though, were yet to cease. Two more AL men were shot dead back to back on May 18 and May 19 in Rangamati and Bandarban.

The bloody spell of murders took even more political overtones, as 22 political murders took place in 2018.

According to officials in the law enforcement and intelligence agencies, several hundred armed youths working for the two factions of the PCJSS and the two factions of the UPDF are responsible for such killings, along with incidents of extortion and abduction, in the three hill districts -- Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban.

When a member of one group is attacked, retaliatory attacks follow soon after, but none of the groups ever claims responsibility.

Four UPDF members, two PCJSS supporters and two PCJSS (MN Larma) activists were gunned down between January and May.

The violence puts the lives of 16 lakh people in the CHT -- which consists of 13,189sqkm and is home to 11 ethnic communities -- in danger.

There is a belief that little progress of investigations into such killings encourage criminals.

Rangamati Superintendent of Police Alomgir Kabir said criminals make use of the geographical advantage in the area as the rugged hills make it hard for law enforcement agencies to conduct operations.

"After committing crimes, they [the attackers] go into hiding in the remote areas of the hills and border areas," he said.

**WHY THE VIOLENCE?**

Exploring why there had been a flare up in violence, a number of answers came up -- rivalry between the regional political groups and their power struggles, use of illegal arms, extortion, no election in CHT regional and district councils, mistrust between locals and Bengali settlers, land issues, and slow implementation of the CHT peace accord.

Some political analysts think that the regional parties gradually losing control over CHT politics could be a reason for the rise in violence.

In the last general elections, no one from the regional parties was elected, with Awami League winning all three seats in CHT districts. The AL-backed candidates also won the majority of the chairman and vice-chairman seats during the upazila elections.

Others, however, put it down to fights over establishing supremacy in the area.

Kujendra Lal Tripura, an AL

leader and the incumbent lawmaker from Khagrachhari, blamed the split between regional parties and a violent streak in gaining power, for the current state.

"The peace accord was signed 22 years ago so that people of all communities can live here peacefully. But what we are seeing now? They [the regional parties] themselves got divided and are fighting with each other for establishing supremacy... They are practicing power using illegal arms and killing each other."

"Yet they accuse the government of delaying the implementation of the peace accord. Do they really want peace?" Kujendra Lal asked, adding that the situation was getting complicated.

Some others think the problem CHT should be seen through the eyes of the locals.

Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, popularly known as Santu Larma, president of the PCJSS, has blamed the government's "dillydallying" in implementation of the peace accord.

Former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Prof Mizanur Rahman, said such violence in CHT was ultimately benefiting those who did not want the implementation of the peace accord.

"There has been a struggle for power among the parties regarding who will represent the hill tracts and who will remain close to power... But no matter what the reason is, the fact is killing has been taking place, worsening the human rights situation in the CHT."

"So it's a responsibility of the state to find out the liable persons [behind these murders], and bring them under the law," Prof Mizanur said.

More than 700 people, including political leaders and public representatives, were killed even after signing of the peace accord, according to different political organisations in the CHT.

The CHT Peace Accord was signed in 1997 between the government and the Santu Larma led PCJSS during the first tenure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The accord brought an end to the bloody conflicts prevalent in the three hill districts.

But a year after the signing of the peace accord, a group of ethnic minority people, led by Prosid Bikash Khisa, formed the UPDF opposing the accord. The party split and UPDF (Democratic), led by Tapan Jyoti Chakma, was formed in November 15, 2017.

The PCJSS also saw a split as some left the organisation in 2007 and formed PCJSS (MN Larma), led by Sudha Sindho Khisa. The rivalry between the two groups began since.

## Power blocs lose grip

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Riding what they called Europe's "green wave" backed by Europe-wide rallies urging climate action, environmentalist parties made strong gains, notably in Germany, one of the continent's main forces for EU integration. The picture of a fractured assembly for the next five years was complete as many citizens turned their backs on the centre-right European People's Party -- one of its key figures, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, saw her party lose ground -- and the centre-left Socialists.

"We are facing a shrinking centre of the European Union parliament," a subdued EPP lead candidate Manfred Weber said, after just over 50 percent of the EU's more than 400 million voters had turned out over four days in the world's biggest transnational elections. "From now on, those who want to have a strong European Union have to join forces."

The Socialist lead candidate, Frans Timmermans, essentially conceded defeat, even though the two groups remain the assembly's biggest by some margin.

"If you lose an election, if you lose seats, you have to be modest," the former Dutch foreign minister said. "We have lost seats and this means that we have to be humble."

Spanish caretaker Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez was a notable exception, as his victorious Socialists looked set to win 20 of the country's 54 seats in the European Parliament.

While real power in Europe remains in the hands of the 28 member states, the assembly's influence has grown. It's helped improve air flight safety in Europe, cut down on plastics use, end mobile telephone roaming charges inside the bloc, boost data privacy, and cut carbon dioxide emissions from cars.

The parliament also has an important say in international treaties ranging

from trade talks to Brexit.

But now new, uncomfortable alliances must be forged. The pro-business liberals, or ALDE, backed by French President Emmanuel Macron -- whose Republic on the Move party is set to win 23 seats, the same number as Le Pen's National Rally -- insist that Europe's traditional political certainties are a thing of the past.

"The monopoly of power has been broken," said ALDE lead candidate Margrethe Vestager, currently the EU's competition commissioner, describing Sunday's polls as "a signal for change."

Party group leaders began their horse-trading yesterday to see what kind of stable alliance can be established and who might secure the EU's top jobs. Their decisions will set the stage for EU leaders, who meet over dinner today to see where the political pieces lie and discuss potential candidates.

## 6 Bangladeshis

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they have been arrested," Arun said.

He said the information given by the arrestees showed that they had also visited Punjab and Rajasthan.

"During interrogation, they said they had tried to go to Pakistan by crossing the barbed-wire fence but were unsuccessful. Their Pakistan-based accomplices had told them to sneak into Pakistan with the help of an electric tester to find out whether electricity was flowing through the fence. Four testers were seized from their possessions," the officer said.

Seven mobile phones, nine SIM cards, six Aadhaar cards, memory cards, and cash were also seized, Arun said.

Last year, the ATS had arrested three people, including a Bangladeshi national, for their alleged involvement in preparing fake passports, Aadhaar cards and other documents for illegal immigrants.



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