

NZ cops trial armed patrols after mosques shooting

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand police yesterday announced the introduction of armed patrols in response to the Christchurch mosques massacre in which 51 Muslim worshippers were killed.

The force prides itself on operating largely as an unarmed service, but Commissioner Mike Bush said changes needed to be implemented after the worst mass shooting in modern New Zealand history in March.

"Following the events of March 15 in Christchurch, our operating environment has changed," Bush said.

The threat level remains at medium and we are continuously reviewing our tools, training, and capabilities we use to provide policing services to ensure we remain fit for purpose."

Officers on regular patrols in New Zealand do not carry firearms but there are Armed Offender Squads (AOS) that can be mobilised when required.

Under the new system being trialled in three regions, including Christchurch, AOS officers will be constantly on patrol in specialised vehicles, allowing for more rapid

response times.

"The trial of these new teams will be closely monitored and does not mean that police are moving to routine arming," Police Minister Stuart Nash said.

The two police officers who arrested the alleged mosque shooter were armed at the time, and earlier that day had attended a training session on dealing with armed offenders.

The pair, who have not been publicly identified, received bravery awards from Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern this week.

The armed patrols are the latest in a string of reforms Ardern's government has introduced in the wake of the massacre, including tightening gun ownership laws and launching a firearms buyback scheme.

This week Ardern announced the establishment of an investigation team dedicated solely to tackling online extremism, and she has pushed tech giants to do more to tackle the issue.

The alleged Christchurch gunman, Australian Brenton Tarrant, has pleaded not guilty to 51 counts of murder, 40 of attempted murder, and engaging in a terrorist act.

His trial will begin on June 2 next year in Christchurch.

Good news for tourists

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Currently, buses operate on five cross-border routes: Dhaka-Kolkata-Dhaka, Dhaka-Agartala-Dhaka, Dhaka-Sylhet-Shillong-Guwahati-Dhaka, Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata-Agartala and Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata-Dhaka.

Suvenker Ghosh Rakesh, managing director of Shyamoli NR Travels, which operates bus on all the five routes, said they had earlier placed proposals to the ministry following demands of holidaymakers.

A large number of holidaymakers seek for direct bus services to Gangtok and Darjeeling as those are popular tourist destinations, he said.

Besides, many Bangladeshi parents send their children to boarding schools in Darjeeling and they make frequent visits to the area, he added.

Distance between Dhaka and Darjeeling via Siliguri is around 450-kilometre whereas distance between Dhaka and Gangtok via Siliguri is around 500-kilometre.

"We are ready to operate buses on these routes if the government allows us to do so," Suvenker said on October 6.

Mahbub Hossain Sumon, managing director of Touch Creation Ltd, a travel agency, hailed the move, saying, "This definitely is a great initiative."

He said India lifted a ban in last November that restricted foreigners from entering Gangtok and now anyone can take permission from Indian High Commission in Dhaka or from India to visit there.

He, however, said heavy buses would not be operated from Siliguri to Darjeeling due to narrow and zigzag roads.

Light vehicles can go there, he added.

About possible costs, he said it would cost around Tk 15,000 per person to visit the destinations for

three to four days.

Asked whether the initiative can put adverse impact on domestic tourism in Bangladesh, Sumon replied in negative.

"Those who want to visit Darjeeling or Gangtok will go there at any cost. The direct bus service will just help them," he said.

PROBLEMS IN EXISTING ROUTES

Faruk Talukder Sohel, managing director of Sohag Paribahan, said although several private bus companies have their service on the existing routes, only one can directly go to the destinations.

Other operators need to change buses at the border. Indian private operators then take the passengers from the borders to their destinations, he added.

Currently, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) has the licence to operate bus directly through border but the state-run agency does not operate bus. Rather, it chose Shyamoli NR Travels through competitive bidding to do so, Sohel said.

"It will be very good if private operators are allowed to operate buses directly," he said.

Sohel said passengers of these routes often face problems at immigration if there is any delay at the ferry terminals.

"We have requested the government to give special privilege to the international passengers at the ferry terminals, but to no avail," he alleged.

Sohel also echoed him.

He demanded dedicated separate booths at borders, especially at Benapole, for passage of cross-border buses.

The facility will help passengers of the cross-border buses to complete their immigration process quickly.

Govt to block PUBG

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Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) decided to block the game after discussing it with the minister concerned, the police official added.

The police official said they suggested the move after receiving many complaints from citizens, triggered by the "violent" and "addictive" nature of the game.

"There is no other intention of the government," Najmul said. He said while some of the IPs had already blocked the game, the entire ban would take some time as it was a long process.

"But the process is underway," he said.

PUBG is a hugely popular, online multiplayer shooting game that has been topping the charts in countries around the world, including Bangladesh.

In the survival-themed version of the game, up to one hundred players parachute onto an island and scavenge it for weapons and equipment to ensure their survival. Players have to kill others to survive or to avoid being killed themselves. The last player or team standing wins the round.

Meanwhile, PUBG player communities in Bangladesh have complained of facing problems in playing the game since the start of October. They claimed BTRC had already blocked the gaming port, before the official announcement to do so.

According to a PUBG player, the game could still be downloaded, however, its server could not be accessed.

Many gamers also protested the move saying it had hurt gaming communities in Bangladesh. Many also resorted to giving negative ratings to BTRC on the regulator's Facebook page.

The Daily Star tried to contact several Posts and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar, and some BTRC officials over the issue, but could not reach any

of them.

Bluehole, PUBG's South Korean developer, first released the game for PCs and Microsoft's Xbox One console in 2017.

In 2018, when Chinese internet giant Tencent published the game as a free-to-play title on smartphones, PUBG exploded around the world becoming one of the best-selling and most-played video games of all time, selling over fifty million copies worldwide by June 2018, with over 400 million players in total when including the mobile version.

It had a peak of over 660 thousand concurrent players globally in the last recorded month, September 2019. The highest number of concurrent players was recorded in January 2018 at 3.24 million, according to statista.com.

Bangladesh has no recorded incident of any violence which could be attributed directly to video games.

Video games have always generated a lot of controversy. Best-selling titles like Grand Theft Auto (GTA) and Mortal Kombat have provoked outrage in some quarters and even been banned in multiple countries around the world.

Multiple cities in India had earlier banned PUBG and police in some cities had also arrested as many as 20 people for playing the game despite the ban.

The move by Bangladesh follows similar restrictions in Iraq, Nepal, Jordan and the Indonesian province of Aceh.

In Nepal's case, however, its supreme court issued an interim order on the government not to ban the popular online game, observing that PUBG was basically a game used by the general public for entertainment.

US President Donald Trump has often blamed video games for the mass shootings his country often sees. Researchers, however, have maintained that there is little to no correlation between the two.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses with the winners of a cultural competition at the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday. Sheikh Russell Jatiya Shishu-Kishore Parishad organised the programme, marking the birthday of Sheikh Russell, youngest son of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

PHOTO: PID

Red tape holds back progress

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which is a long-drawn-out exercise.

"And the situation is even more dragged-out in China," said a finance ministry official upon condition of anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

For instance, if the Chinese side do not agree to or fail to understand even a particular word in the project documents, they send the file back to Bangladesh for the process to start afresh.

Besides, China's Exim Bank has some limitations: only a few officials of the bank deal with foreign loans, so the funds are released very slowly.

The intense lobbying by Chinese firms in both the countries to win the contracts for the development projects cause further delays, the finance ministry official said.

"Having said that, whatever the amount China has released thus far is a big step up when viewed from an historical perspective. They always made negligible donations and their assistance was mostly in the form cheaper contracts."

Since 2016, \$1.8 billion was committed on average each year, which is in line with what the multilateral lenders do.

"Also, as per Chinese Exim bank officials, Beijing does not commit more than \$3 billion a year to any country as it deems any amount

higher than this might be beyond the repayment capacity of the country," he added.

Regardless, to probe the slow progress, a joint working group has been formed earlier this year during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to China. The group is likely to meet this month in Dhaka.

At present, five of the China-funded projects are in the implementation stage: the Padma bridge rail link, Karnaphuli river tunnel, phase III of the Info-Sarkar project, installation of a single-point mooring with double pipeline in Maheshkhali and modernisation of telecommunication network for digital connectivity.

The phase-III of the Info-Sarkar project is almost complete, while construction of the Karnaphuli river tunnel project is 48 percent done as of September, said an official of bridges division.

As of August, 17.15 percent of the work for the Padma bridge rail link was done, according to an official of the railways ministry.

Commerce ministry officials said two separate studies will be conducted by Bangladesh and China to reach a consensus for the free trade agreement.

In Bangladesh, the tariff commission has been tasked with conducting the preliminary feasibility study and the first draft of the study has been completed.

The aim is to ink a deal before 2024, before Bangladesh graduates from the least-developing country bracket.

Artist Kalidas Karmakar no more

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doctors pronounced him dead around 2:00pm, said Sourav Chowdhury, executive artistic director at Gallery Cosmos.

Kalidas's body, kept at BirDEM mortuary, will be taken to the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University on Sunday morning at 10:00am.

The body will be taken to the Central Shaheed Minar at 11:00am for people to pay their tributes. His cremation will take place after his two daughters, Kanka Karmakar and Keya Karmakar return to Bangladesh from the USA.

Expressing shock at his death, renowned artist and professor Mohammad Eunus mentioned in a Facebook post that Kalidas once saved him from drowning in the Meghna river.

In an interview a few years ago with The Daily Star, Kalidas said, "As my painting symbolically represents the connotations of our glorious Liberation War, various social

phenomena and their perceptions, unwanted political unrests and the life sketches of the people of this part of the world, I recurrently choose the very word 'Alluvial' in titles of many of my solo exhibitions.

"The mind of every Bangalee is as soft as the alluvial clay and, at the same time, it is as hard as the stone after that clay gets burnt with fire. For that very feature, we got tough against Pakistanis and liberated our motherland in 1971."

Dr Malay Bala, associate professor of the DU Faculty of Fine Arts, said Kalidas celebrated his life in an artistic way. "One can easily find his vivacious presence in his creations. His artistic realm is diverse. He did paintings, prints, sculptures, installations and performances. His artworks are modern and thought-provoking."

In an installation, Kalidas once created six statues to signify the historic six-point charter of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu

Before completing his graduation in fine arts from the College of Fine Arts and Crafts, Kolkata, India, Kalidas had a two-year pre-degree study at the Institute of Fine Arts, now Faculty of Fine Arts of Dhaka University. He attained many scholarships and fellowships in different countries.

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Panicked, the BSF members started rushing back to the Indian side along with the fisherman. As the BGB personnel tried to obstruct them, the BSF members opened fire, forcing the BGB team to fire back in self-defence.

Later at a flag meeting between the two sides, the BGB came to know that one BSF jawan was killed and another was injured, BGB officials said.

Quoting BSF officials, Indian media reported that Head Constable Vijay Bhan Singh died in the BGB firing while another border guard was injured.

Meanwhile, a case was filed against the Indian fisherman with Chharghat police station yesterday for intrusion into Bangladesh and catching egg-carrying hilsa defying a government ban on the fishing.

The fisherman -- Pranab Mondol, 45, of Chhira Char village of India's

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. They also featured the bodies of the martyred intellectuals and the freedom fighters.

In his interview with this correspondent, he once said, "Silphacharya Zainul Abedin with Patau Quamrul Hassan, Shilpaguru Safiuddin Ahmed and others planted the seed of art in this part of the world. We need proper platforms for art to flourish round the year. A heart of a country is its art museum. When we go to New York, we visit MOMA; when we visit London, we go to Tate Modern; when we visit Paris, we must go Louvre; when we visit Delhi, we go to National Gallery of Modern Art. Bangladesh needs such museums as well."

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Mavildar Humayun Kabir, commander of Chharghat border outpost under Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Battalion 1 in Rajshahi filed the case in connection with violation of the Control of Entry Act, 1952 and Protection and Conservation of Fish Act, 1950.

According to the case statement, the accused was caught red handed after he entered Bangladesh without any travel documents, the OC said.

The Indian fisherman was catching brood hilsa in the Padma in Chharghat upazila defying the ban imposed on catching hilsa for its conservation, he said.

The OC said a Rajshahi court sent the arrestee to jail.

Yesterday's discussion at the Jatiya Press Club was organised by Sampriti Bangladesh, a citizens' platform.

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Nobel Committee member defends Handke pick

AFP, Stockholm

A member of the committee which selects the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature yesterday defended the controversial decision to give the award to Austrian author Peter Handke.