

Fresh fighting in Myanmar frightens villagers

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, *Ctg*

Villagers in three unions of Bandarban and Cox's Bazar are living in fear as they heard gunshots and shelling inside Myanmar where a fight between the Myanmar Army and Arakan Army rages on.

Sources said residents of 31 villages in three unions of Ukhiya, Teknaf and Naikhongchhari upazilas heard the sounds early Friday.

Nur Ahmed Anwari, chairman of Whykhong Union Parishad in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar, told The Daily Star that fear gripped around 500 families in three villages of the union, and the villagers were asked to tread carefully.

"BGB members are patrolling the embankment of the Naf river."

"However, the gunfire stopped on Friday night," he added.

Jahangir Aziz, chairman of Ghumdhum Union Parishad in Naikhongchhari upazila of Bandarban, said, "We heard the gunshots and the sound of heavy explosion near pillar No 39 and 40 along Tumbru border."

Imran Hossain Sajib, Ukhiya upazila nirbahi officer, told this correspondent that 100 families are living in three wards of Palongkhali union within 300 metres of Bangladesh-Myanmar border. "After the start of the heavy fighting on the other side of the border, the villagers got panicked."

Lt Col Mehedi Hasan Kabir, commanding officer of 34 BGB Battalion, said, "We have kept our force on alert and increased patrolling. The shooting and shelling took place inside Myanmar. So, there is nothing to be worried about."

According to the local administration, over 4,000 Rohingyas who fled Myanmar fearing persecution by Myanmar security forces in 2017 are living in a Rohingya camp on the no-man's-land near Tumbru Bazar in Naikhongchhari.

Last month, an 18-year-old Rohingya man was killed and five others, including two children, were injured as a mortar shell fired from Myanmar exploded in the camp.

The Arakan Army, a Myanmar separatist group, has been fighting with Myanmar security forces in the country's Rakhine State close to Ghumdhum border for more than a month.

During this fight, mortar shells have landed inside Bangladesh territory multiple times.

[Our Bandarban correspondent contributed to this report.]



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Ever since the construction work of Chattogram elevated expressway began in 2018, the Bandartila road under the expressway has not been resurfaced. As a result, there are potholes and puddles all over the road. The photo was taken recently.

PROTESTS IN IRAN OVER MAHSA AMINI DEATH

World rallies in solidarity

AFP, Paris

Iranians based abroad and their supporters gathered in cities around the world yesterday in solidarity with protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini in the custody of the country's notorious morality police.

A wave of street violence has rocked Iran since Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, died days after her arrest by the morality police for allegedly failing to observe the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

Protests were held across Iran for a 15th consecutive night on Friday, despite a bloody crackdown that a rights group says has claimed more than 80 lives.

"Woman, life, freedom" and "Death to the dictator", they chanted in the streets of Amini's hometown of Saqqez, in Kurdistan province.

Riot police massed yesterday at major intersections in Tehran, amid reports of demonstrations at universities to seek the release of arrested students.

The '1500tasvir' social media channel shared video footage of large demonstrations in the capital, as well as the

shrine city of Mashhad and Kermanshah in the west.

Demonstrations in support of the movement are being held meanwhile in 159 cities across the globe – from Auckland to New York and Seoul to Zurich, according to the Iranians for Justice and Human Rights group.

"Be our voice," was the catchcry of a protest in the eastern Australian city of Brisbane, where organisers said thousands from the Iranian diaspora demanded freedoms in their homeland.

In Tokyo, demonstrators waved pictures of Amini and other women who defiantly burned their headscarves and cut their hair during the Iranian protests.

A half-dozen women in Rome – among around 1,000 who gathered in total, some waving the Iranian national flag – likewise cut their hair in solidarity.

The protests flared in Iran on September 16, when Amini was pronounced dead three days after falling into a coma following her arrest.

Oslo-based Iran Human Rights group says at least 83 people have been killed in the crackdown. Amnesty International

says it has confirmed 52 fatalities, while Iran's Fars news agency has put the death toll at "around 60".

It is the bloodiest unrest in Iran since a ruthless crackdown on demonstrations in November 2019 over a sudden hike in fuel prices which killed at least 304 people, according to Amnesty.

Security forces used live ammunition and tear gas on Friday to try to disperse demonstrations in various cities and towns across the country.

Mir Hossein Mousavi, a former prime minister who has been under house arrest for more than a decade, urged security forces to halt the violence, in a message on the Instagram account of opposition group Kaleme.

Iran's intelligence ministry said "nine foreign nationals", including from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland, were arrested "at or behind the scene of riots", along with 256 members of outlawed opposition groups.

Unrest also erupted on Friday in Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, which borders Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said two of its colonels were killed, bringing the official toll to 20 dead during the clashes in the province. Three police stations were attacked.



We do not need

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the rule of law. We don't do anything in violation of it. So, there is no question of reformation."

He was talking to reporters after placing wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu in Dhanmondi 32.

"We are yet to receive any proposal [regarding reforms]."

On September 29, the US envoy said the sanctions, imposed on Rab and seven of its current and former officials for alleged human rights violations, will remain in place until accountability is ensured and reforms are made.

"There has been no change in our policy. The sanctions are in place. They will remain in place until there is accountability and reform. We said this privately, we said this publicly," he said at a programme.

The new Rab DG, Khurshid, does not have any sanction imposed on him.

However, two of his predecessors – outgoing Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed and newly appointed IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun – are among the seven officials on whom sanctions were placed.

Replying to a query, Khurshid said, "I don't think it [the sanctions] is a big challenge for the government or for us. We will continue doing our jobs."

"It's true that people make mistakes on the job. But you have to see whether those happened for personal interest or for that of the countrymen."

He further said, "They [the US] imposed sanctions, which are being dealt with officially. We have already told them whatever they wanted to know from us, after which they haven't gotten the scope to raise further questions."

Back to yaba biz after weathering the storm

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Hafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Model Police Station, admitted this and said police were arresting them.

When Jamal was asked about his alleged involvement in yaba trade again, he said, "This is a rumour to tarnish our family's image. My rivals who are not happy to see me elected as a union parishad member are spreading the false information. They even framed my son Azam for yaba dealing."

He further claimed that Azam was now engaged in farming and leading a normal life.

During a visit to Teknaf on September 15, this correspondent pretending to be an NGO worker managed to talk to yaba dealer Nurul Mijhi.

Mijhi was among the surrendered 102 top yaba dealers.

Asked how successful the police's narcotic surrender programme has been, Mijhi opined that it had failed.

"Society does not accept us even after we surrender. Rather, we are stigmatised as 'surrendered yaba dealer' everywhere we go," he said.

"So, why should I stop working in the narcotics trade? I am already labelled as a yaba dealer," he remarked.

PROTECTED BY POLITICAL INFLUENCE

In 2019, around 123 top narcotics dealers in Teknaf surrendered to the police in two phases.

These top dealers surrendered after the law enforcers started a countrywide crackdown against narcotics in May 2018, with a special focus on Cox's Bazar as the district is known as the major entry point for yaba pills from Myanmar.

In the last three and a half years, at least 299 people were killed in so-called gunfights with law enforcers during the drive against narcotics in the beach town.

During the surrender, four brothers of former Awami League lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodi also surrendered to police as top narcotics dealers.

Aminur Rahman was among the four who surrendered. He was released on bail in November 2020. Now he is allegedly giving shelter to many of the drug dealers.

Aminur is currently the president of Customs Clearing and Forwarding Agents association in Teknaf. But in the guise of a businessman, he is backing yaba smugglers.

Enquired about his patronage of yaba dealers, Aminur first asked this correspondent to meet him in person

in Teknaf.

But later he said he did not have any idea about drug trafficking now.

Teknaf Union Parishad Chairman Ziaur Rahman who surrendered to the police in 2019, however, said that none of the surrendered dealers had gone back to the previous trade.

"I have not heard anything like this," he said.

Sources, however, said Ziaur himself returned to drug trafficking after coming out of jail.

Ziaur said the allegation was false and that he was helping the law enforcers make a list of drug dealers.

A local source said Ziaur now owned a sawmill and a shopping mall in Teknaf. His drug trade was hidden behind the façade of these businesses.

Nurul Bashar, president of Teknaf Upazila Awami League, told The Daily Star that many of the yaba godfathers became local government representatives.

"These godfathers have just collected a clean chit by surrendering to the police. Now they are leading the law-and-order meetings," he said.

"There is no rule of law. You will not be able to change anything by writing about it," he said.

Law enforcers are now making a new list of yaba smugglers, said the AL

leader.

"I told in the law-and-order meeting that making a list of yaba dealers would be a waste of money and time. It would be better and save time if the list is made on those people who are not involved in yaba business," Bashar added with frustration.

According to sources, at least seven narcotics dealers, who had surrendered to police, are now elected councillors, union parishad members, and chairmen.

Mahfuzul Islam, superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar, told The Daily Star that he started surveillance on the surrendered yaba traders just after taking charge on August 26.

"We have so far found that new cases were filed against five surrendered dealers. Around 10 dealers kept their promises and stopped all kinds of narcotic trade," he said.

"We are now checking the rest of the surrendered narcotic dealers' activities," he said, adding, "we have taken an initiative to sit with them soon near their houses as part of a soft approach to know whether they are facing any problems to go back to normal life."

After the soft approach, tougher action will be taken against those who had surrendered, made a promise, and started trafficking again, he said.

Rejoinder, our reply

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prepared on the basis of CAG compliance report regarding Petrobangla and its subsidiary companies. But in the heading BPC's name was mentioned along with Petrobangla which is unjustified and unethical."

The rejoinder maintained that BPC was "not related with this CAG report at all".

OUR REPLY

The Daily Star has a copy of the said Bangladesh Comptroller and Auditor General report, which categorically mentions that it was based on a compliance audit on 11 companies under Petrobangla and two companies of BPC.

Due to space constraints, we did not elaborate on all 19 of the irregularities found by the CAG audit team that cost the state coffers Tk 4,697 crore in total. And the anomalies detected in the two companies of BPC were left out.

In fiscal 2013-14, the BPC company Eastern Refinery had paid the income tax of its employees for fiscal 2011-12 amounting to Tk 1.47 crore from its own funds, going against the finance ministry's order.

As per the employees' pay scale, they were supposed to furnish their income tax themselves.

The company continued to pay the income tax for fiscal 2013-14 on behalf of its employees, the CAG report said.

In its response to CAG, Eastern Refinery said it paid the income tax as an additional benefit to employees with a high aptitude to retain them. The response was not accepted by the CAG audit team, which called for retrieving the sum from the employees.

Excessive fuel loss during transit cost Jamuna Oil, another BPC company, Tk 3.05 crore in fiscal 2013-14.

As is practice, some losses occur when handling, loading and unloading oil.

There is a permissible volume of oil losses and Jamuna Oil's losses during shipment from the Chattogram depot to Khulna and Barisal depots went beyond the limit, the CAG audit team said, while calling for recovering the sum from the concerned parties.

As such, we stand by our report.

Dhaka loses \$6b a year

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In 2020, Dhaka experienced 36.5 days in which the 24-hour average temperature was more than 28.8 degree Celsius. By 2050, this could rise to 69.8 days.

The surface of roads can currently reach up to 60 degree Celsius, found the report.

"Large and widespread hotspots within the city are more than 10 degree Celsius higher than the surrounding countryside."

The heat impacts the poor disproportionately, said the report.

"The highest worker productivity-related economic losses from the heat are felt by those least able to bear them. In sectors such as garment manufacturing, transport, and retail

trade, where wages can be lower than average, losses already amount to around 10 percent of income."

Losses in manufacturing are likely to be particularly high in sectors such as garment manufacturing or brick making, where proximity to machinery or ovens increases the temperature to which workers are exposed, said the report.

It said that heat is concentrated in some of the city's poorest areas.

"In Kamrangirchar, an area containing a high concentration of informal settlements with widespread use of corrugated iron sheet roofing, temperatures are typically 12 degree Celsius higher than Dhaka's surroundings."

Such temperatures lead to health

risks, it added.

"The world is burning. Unfortunately, that's not an exaggeration. Climate driven heat is changing the way we live and work," commented the report.

Ashraf Dewan, a professor at School of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Curtin University, Australia, had earlier studied urban heat islands and how the temperature of Dhaka has risen over the decades.

"Urban heat islands are places whose temperature is hotter than the surrounding areas. In Dhaka, temperature is sporadically felt differently in different places," said Dewan.

"The poorest areas are hotter because of lack of greenery and the use of

corrugated iron sheets. These trap heat during the day, and do not radiate heat fast enough at night. Since these areas are surrounded by high rise buildings that do not facilitate wind flow, the air gets trapped," he explained.

"Water bodies used to cool down the city. But we don't have water bodies anymore. In addition, the reliance on air conditioners lead to heat being dispensed into the surrounding air."

"Furthermore, glass buildings aggravate urban heat islands – they let in heat and light during the day but they need more air conditioners for cooling."

Professor Dewan said that the easiest and cost-effective solution is to plant more trees – they do not let the air temperature rise.