

POST-COUP MYANMAR Ethnic minority fighters clash with military on major trade route

AFP, Yangon

Ethnic minority fighters clashed with Myanmar's military on a major trade route to Thailand yesterday, blocking traffic and sending people fleeing, residents and local media said.

Fighters from the Karen National Union (KNU) fought with the military at dawn in the town of Kawkaeik in eastern Karen state, according to local media reports.

The town sits on the Asia Highway that links the trade hub of Myawaddy on the Thai border with Myanmar's biggest city Yangon.

Video from Kawkaeik uploaded to social media showed around a dozen trucks parked and a plume of smoke billowing into the sky as people took shelter.

AFP digital verification reporters have geo-located the video, which has not appeared online before.

A resident of Kyondoe, a town about 20km west of Kawkaeik along the highway, reported hearing artillery fire from nearby military bases since November 30 night.

"I saw jet fighters coming as well," said the resident, who did not want to be named for security reasons. "Residents from our Kyondoe town are fleeing. Very few men are left behind to take care of our houses. But since we saw jet fighters flying, we are now preparing to leave as well."

Myanmar has more than a dozen ethnic minority armed groups, many of which hold territory in the country's border regions and have battled the military since independence from Britain in 1948.

Following the coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in February 2021, dozens of People's Defence Force (PDF) groups have also sprung up to fight the junta.

PDF fighters have conducted operations alongside troops from the KNU, including an assault on Kawkaeik town last year.

The Asia Highway between Yangon and Myawaddy has been blocked regularly over decades of fighting between the military and the KNU.

Myawaddy was the second busiest of Myanmar's six official border trade crossings with Thailand from April to November 2023, according to Myanmar's commerce ministry, handling almost a US\$1 billion (SS1.34 billion) of imports and exports.

Myanmar's two busiest trade hubs on its northern border with China have also been blocked since last month by a separate offensive by ethnic minority fighters in Shan state.

The blockages have choked cross-border commerce and denied the cash-strapped junta taxes and foreign exchange.



Exploring river HERITAGE OF DHAKA

RBR

We, as residents of this bustling metropolis, have never given much thought to what and who defines the city's economy and culture. We hardly ever give any consideration to how the ghats (river fronts) of Old Dhaka and their related business have had an impact on all sorts of stakeholders in the adjoining area and also how these ghat-related livelihoods impacted the city in turn.

Take Swarighat as a case in point. Fishermen, boatmen, merchants, middlemen, men who supply ice, cleaners and cutters, nearby hostels where these men sleep, hotels where they eat -- all these livelihoods are in motion surrounding the fish market.



And their business, in turn, tumbles into the city and that is how the wheel of this mega city runs.

This fine storyline, which is a reflection on how occupation and livelihood in a certain area influence the socio-transitions of Dhaka, is showcased in an exhibition at the Hamidur Rahman Cultural Centre, in collaboration with Alliance Française de Dhaka.

The unusual exhibition, which commenced on November 28 will be open to people until December 5.

"River Heritage: Learning from Puran Dhaka" presents a rich learning experience from the study of eight ghats of Old Dhaka, from Buriganga to Farashganj.

It is EUNIC's (European Union National Institutes for Culture) third chapter on the heritage initiative -- River Heritage -- focusing on the rich



cultural and architectural legacy of Puran Dhaka, including its people's way of life, their means of subsistence, and the intricate relationship they maintain between the river and the city.

Their efforts culminated in an array of drawings, maps, plans, observations, photographs, and testimonies from local inhabitants, which are on display.

Narrated through the eyes of young architects, this exhibition is more than a display of creative work; it is a documentation on the urbanity of occupations in Old Dhaka from rivers to the city. That means documenting settlements through some of its significant streetscapes -- residential, religious, educational, social institutions, and the relationship between the river and the occupations along it.

Mohammad Tahajibul Hossain, assistant professor, Department of Architecture, Buet, said, "Through a mix of sketches, measure drawings, photographs and interviews, students recorded the contemporary environment of the Puran Dhaka and developed a template to represent the same for the purpose of architectural conservation efforts, which will be shown at the exhibition."

"Dhaka was born on the banks of Buriganga. It was the centre of trade and commerce at one point and provided livelihood for the people of the city and its periphery. Currently,

Rupla House, the grand 19th century mansion in Farashganj, houses a wholesale market of spices; a soap factory is present at the entrance of Chhota Kutra, Mangal Aloy in Shyam Bazar allows people to sleep the night -- these encroachments threaten the buildings and at the same time allows these people to survive.

The main objective of the workshop was to learn and in our two-week observation we feel that if these trades are to be decentralised, we need to think of alternatives to protect them as well. These heritage buildings are sheltering the toiling masses, though these are illegally occupied.

Many livelihoods are dependent in these areas and help local inhabitant, low-income labourers."

"Dhaka still looks at these rivers, so when we think of future urbanisation, we must remember so many stakeholders' dependency in our future policy," explained Hossain.

The programme included Indo-French partners of architecture colleges (ENSAPLAV: Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris La Villette, Paris Franc and BVCOA: Bharati Vidyapeeth's College of Architecture, of Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India), and College of Architecture Trivandrum (CAT), Kerala, India, and Pathshala School of Photography, Dhaka, Bangladesh and Department of Architecture, Buet.

Two men murdered in Joypurhat, Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Unidentified criminals murdered two elderly men, one in Joypurhat and the other in Dinajpur, between Thursday night and the early hours of yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Syed Ali, 60, of Shikra village under Joypurhat's Kalai upazila, and Kamala Kantra Roy, 60, of Kartik Baniapara village under Dinajpur Sadar upazila.

Kalai Police Station Officer-in-Charge Wasim Al Bari said Syed Ali had been living alone since his wife passed away. "When one of his sons came to visit him Friday morning, he found his father lying in a pool of blood on his bed."

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to Joypurhat Modern Hospital for autopsy.

Two people were arrested in connection with the killing, he added.

Similarly, criminals stabbed Kamala Kanta Roy Thursday night while he was heading home by himself, said Abdullah Al Masum, Dinajpur additional superintendent of police (crime).

Police recovered his body from a paddy field at Baniapara village under Dinajpur Sadar upazila after being informed by locals and sent it to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital for an autopsy.

Cases were filed over these two incidents, said the police adding that, both murders were believed to be pre-planned.

Road crashes kill two in Gopalganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

Two men were killed in two separate road accidents in Sadar and Kashiani upazila in Gopalganj last morning.

The deceased were identified as Arun Pramanik, 50, of Ratail village under Kahsiani upazila, and Ripon Sikdar, 30, of Paikerdanga village under Sadar upazila.

The accident took place in Gopinathpur area of the Dhaka-Khulna Highway in the morning.

Quoting locals, Sirajul Islam, sub-inspector of Bhatiapara Highway Police Station said, "The rear wheel of an easybike burst on the highway, causing the hubcap to get loose and hit Ripon, a bystander."

He seriously injured. Locals rushed him to the nearest hospital, where an on-duty doctor declared him dead.

A little earlier to this incident, a truck ran over Arun Pramanik on the highway in the Bhatiapara area. He died on the spot.

Seven still missing after US Osprey crash off Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's coastguard yesterday scoured the seabed for the wreckage of an Osprey US military aircraft that crashed this week, with still no sign of seven missing airmen.

Tokyo's defence minister has called on the US military in Japan to ground its Ospreys pending safety checks, but the Pentagon said it was still operating the aircraft and had not received a suspension request.

Nearly 600 killed in South Sudan attacks last year: UN

AFP, Nairobi

Nearly 600 civilians were killed after clashes erupted in South Sudan between August and December last year, the United Nations said yesterday, accusing militias of sexual slavery and indiscriminate attacks.

Tens of thousands of people in Upper Nile state in the far north were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in swamps along a river to escape the deluge of violence between armed groups.

The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the UN Human Rights Office said investigators had documented "indiscriminate attacks, abductions, sexual violence, including rape, gang rape and sexual slavery, and the recruitment and use of children in hostilities, committed by the parties to the conflict."

"UNMISS and the UN Human Rights Office documented at least 884 civilian casualties of which 594 had been killed and 290 injured. In addition, 258 were abducted and 75 women and girls subjected to sexual violence," they said, releasing a joint report summing up the findings.

UNGA president

FROM PAGE 1

"It will certainly, I believe, strengthen their potential to maintain and even expand the relationship with the UN and the international system.

"Democracy is an extremely important foundation upon which sustainable development can be pursued."

Francis said Bangladesh needs to support sustainable development consistently with the Agenda 2030, he said.

"Best of luck in your democratic election."

BNP averts split despite AL efforts

FROM PAGE 1

the submission of papers to the assistant returning officer must have happened really fast for Omar to make the deadline.

"Shahjahan Omar's incident has exposed how the government controls the judiciary. It also exposed the government's effort to split the BNP. This one single incident has laid everything bare," says a standing committee member, wishing not to be named.

The ruling party leaders have often said the BNP men were eagerly waiting to participate in the election, says the leader, adding that those claims are now proven to be hollow rhetoric.

The BNP says over 18,000 leaders and activists have been arrested and more than 500 cases filed since

Independents all-time high

FROM PAGE 1

A total of 39 political parties, including all major political parties, took part in that election.

In 2014, around 150 independent aspirants submitted nominations, and of them, 104 ran in the polls. Only 12 political parties contested amid boycotts by the BNP and other opposition parties, resulting in 153 lawmakers getting elected opposed.

There were 120 independent candidates in 1973, 422 in 1979, 453 in 1986, 214 in 1988, 424 in 1991, 284 in 1996, 486 in 2001, and 151 in 2008 elections, EC data shows.

AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim said, "The party is allowing candidates to vie as independents to make the election more competitive. More candidates mean higher voter turnout; that is also on our minds. But as a disciplined party, Awami League will control the independent candidates if necessary."

Shushaonor Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said the ruling party's decision was key for the record

October 28 when a BNP rally in the capital ended in clashes between law enforcers and party activists.

"It is clear that the BNP is united. People are defying oppression and the opposition parties are running a movement for election under a non-partisan interim government," Goyeshwar says.

According to the BNP, 14 of its leaders, including Omar, were compelled to desert the party. Of them, one was an adviser to the BNP chairperson, six others were executive committee members, and the rest were local leaders.

Two former BNP leaders, Taimur Alam Khandaker and Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, got top leadership positions in the Trinamool BNP. But both of them parted ways with the BNP a long time ago.

number of independents this time.

"They [AL] have taken up a strategy to allow [its leaders to run as] independent and dummy candidates to raise the number of participants, so that the election is among themselves," he said.

"The position of lawmaker is 'a golden deer' for many. If they become lawmakers, they will be able to get money and fame, as well as supremacy in the area. That is why so many people want to be lawmakers," Badiul said.

Meanwhile, BNP and its allies boycotted the polls as they were demanding the election under a non-party polls-time administration.

But the government rejected the demand, prompting the opposition parties to reject the polls schedule announced on November 15.

PARTY WISE ASPIRANTS

The number of AL aspirants is 303, with two contenders each nominated for five seats; while there are 304 aspirants from Jatiya Party, with two contenders each nominated for 18 seats.

Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) has 20

BNP leader Shah Jafar left the party and joined BNM as its acting chairman. Two of BNP's like-minded parties are also joining the election.

In the days following the announcement of the election schedule in mid-November, the BNP faced the challenge of keeping its base united, says a senior leader.

"We successfully overcame the challenge. There are criticisms that our leaders went into hiding. But that was also part of our strategy. They tried not to get arrested and forced to take part in the polls," said the senior leader.

Now that the pressure to join the election is gone, the men who went into hiding will return, says the leader, adding that the party will hold a standing committee meeting today or tomorrow.

candidates, Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal has six, Krishak Shramik Janata League has 34, Gonotantri Party has 12, Bangladesh National Awami Party (NAP) has six, Workers Party of Bangladesh has 33, Bikolpodhara Bangladesh has 14, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) has 91, Zaker Party has 218, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation has 47, Bangladesh Kelafat Andolon has 14, Bangladesh Muslim League has two, National People's Party has 142, Gono Forum has nine, Gono Front has 25, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Mukit) has 13, Islamic Front Bangladesh has 39, Bangladesh Kalyan Party has 18, Islami Oikya Jote has 45, Bangladesh Islami Front has 37, Bangladesh Muslim League (Panja) has five, Bangladesh Sangskritik Muktijote has 74, Bangladesh Nationalist Front has 55, Bangladesh Congress has 116, Trinamool BNP has 151, Bangladesh Nationalist Movement has 49 and Bangladesh Supreme Party has 82.

Political analysts say that these parties are mostly AL allies, and little-known and newly-formed parties.

Transfer all UNOs

FROM PAGE 1

Top administration and police officials said the ECs did not take any initiative for a massive reshuffle in the field-level administration ahead of the general elections in 2008, 2014, and 2018.

"There had been a massive reshuffle of the police officials, including the OCs, ahead of the 2001 general election," former IGP Nurul Huda told The Daily Star.

Anwar Hossain, deputy inspector general (operations) at the Police Headquarters, said they received the EC's instructions.

"We have to follow the instructions as the polls schedule has already been announced," he told this newspaper last night.

Anwar said there are 636 police stations across the country. He, however, could not give the number of OCs serving at their stations for over six months.

He said the Police Headquarters will first collect information about those OCs serving more than six months at their stations.

According to the Representation of the People Order-1972, officials like divisional commissioners, commissioners of metropolitan police units and all their subordinate officials cannot be transferred without the EC's permission after the announcement of the polls schedule.

The EC in its working plan for the 12th national polls pointed out several challenges for holding the election in a free and fair manner. One of those challenges is ensuring the neutral role of the field-level administration and police officials.

A couple of weeks ago, two election commissioners said that they would transfer field-level administration and police officials only if specific allegations brought against the officials concerned were found to be true.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushaonor Janno Nagarik, said a few days back the EC had said it

would not bring any changes to the field-level administration and police offices.

"So, will the OCs be transferred at all or would it remain merely as the Election Commission's instructions?" he questioned.

Asked about the transfer of government officials, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal on Sunday said, "Which Election Commission transferred officials? In 2001, Latifur Rahman transferred the officials. But he was the chief adviser of then caretaker government, not the head of the Election Commission."

Tigers on the verge of huge win

FROM PAGE 1

tailenders to help the Tigers post a target in excess of 300 before getting bundled out soon after Lunch.

Left-arm spinner Patel was the pick of the bowlers for New Zealand with four wickets while leg-spinner Ish Sodhi took a couple.

New Zealand were under pressure from the very onset of their chase, courtesy of Shoriful, who removed Tom Latham for a duck in the first over.

Tajjul, who claimed four wickets in the first innings, then got into the act by removing Kane Williamson for the second time in the match, trapping the right-hander in front for 11 this time.

The 31-year-old, spearheading the spin attack in the absence of Shakib Al Hasan, went on to pick the wickets of Devon Conway (22), Tom Blundell (six) and Kyle Jamieson (nine), all the while keeping a tight leash on the run-scoring.

His fellow spinners, Miraz and Nayeem, also kept things tight as the visitors kept losing wickets in regular intervals. The inaugural WTC winners are now on the brink of tasting a Test defeat against the Tigers for the second time in two years.