

ALERT, SECURITY

EERIE EXPERIENCE for school-goers

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and PANKAG KARMAKAR

Getting off a car, she walked into the compound of an English medium school in the capital's Dhanmondi area.

She then stood in a queue of students of the school, equipped with several closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras at different points.

A security guard was checking the bags of the students with a handheld metal detector and then allowing them to enter the school building.

After a while, her turn came. The grade-VI student entered the building finally after the guard completed checking her bag.

"The children are entering the school this way for the last several weeks," said her father as he watched her daughter go inside the school building.

The picture is the same in many other English medium schools in the area as the school authorities took several security measures on their own in the wake of the recent terror attacks.

The Daily Star correspondents visited several schools in Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur and Uttara recently, and

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Eerie experience

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talked to guardians and teachers on the issue.

Guardians have welcomed the measures taken by the schools, but they think those are inadequate and a bit chaotic. Some of them even questioned the effectiveness of the security arrangements.

They observed that educational institutions should have well-managed security systems with deployment of armed guards.

Several schools said they had sought police deployment at the institutions, but didn't get positive response from the authorities concerned.

Asked, Dhaka Metropolitan Police officials said it was not possible for them to deploy police at every private establishment for lack of manpower.

The DMP has advised the school authorities to apply for deployment of armed Ansar members if necessary.

Following back-to-back attacks at a Gulshan café in the capital and Sholakia in Kishoreganj, there have been serious security concerns among guardians and school authorities, particularly those of English medium and missionary schools.

They found themselves in an uncomfortable situation after government officials warned of further militant attacks. Some schools reportedly received threats as well.

Most of the English medium schools were supposed to reopen at the end of July after vacation, but many of those didn't till mid-August due to security concerns.

A number of schools in Dhanmondi have installed CCTV cameras, archways with metal detectors and increased the number of security guards for frisking whoever enters the schools.

But many of the guardians are still sceptical.

"There are only two or three unarmed security guards here. One of them is busy controlling traffic. How can they [guards] ward off an untoward incident?" asked the guardian of two students at a leading English medium school.

Private security guards, in most cases, are not well-equipped or well-trained, and they don't have much experience in dealing with a difficult situation, he said.

"We think deployment of law enforcers is needed to ensure security."

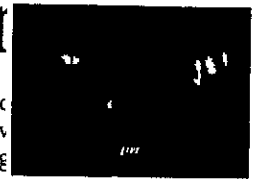
Echoing his view, another guardian of a class-VIII student at the school, said though the school authorities had taken some measures to ensure security, it would have been better if policemen were deployed there.

On condition of anonymity, the father of a class VII student of a nearby school, said, "I am happy to see that the school authorities have taken some security measures."

He, however, said security at the school should be strengthened further.

Some guardians think the security initiatives of school authorities, in many cases, are not arranged in a systematic way and often cause troubles for children.

"The checking of students' bags with handheld metal detectors results in a long queue at the gate. It is difficult for



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detectors and checking of bags. It is even issuing identity cards for the guardians.

"Parents are also advised to check their children's bags frequently and are not even allowed to enter the school premises," she said.

The vice principal of one of the schools, said, "We gave training to our guards, installed CCTV cameras on our campuses and provided the guardians of the students with special cards to ensure security."

The vice principal said they sought police protection but the authorities asked them to contact Ansar.

"We have already contacted the Ansar authorities, but they are yet to respond."

Asked whether they would impose additional charges for security arrangements, she said, "We have not yet decided on it. But the guardians have said they are ready to pay more for their children's security."

A senior teacher at another school said they have taken security measures on their own as per police instructions.

Talking to The Daily Star, eminent security expert Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain said there should be coordination among law enforcers and the school authorities to enhance the security measures.

"Police should not avoid the responsibility of providing security to schools. If police do so, people will lose confidence in them," he said.

"LACK OF MANPOWER"

With a large number of its personnel already engaged in providing security for important installations, it was not possible for the DMP to meet requests from all private establishments for giving them police personnel, said DMP officials.

"We have been trying our best within our capacity to ensure security for the city dwellers," Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of the DMP, told this newspaper recently.

"We are getting an increasing number of requests for providing security personnel. It is not possible for us to meet all those."

"We are requesting them to beef up security measures on their own."

Another DMP official said the measures include installation of CCTV cameras at strategic points of establishments, conducting search with metal detectors, raising the height of bound-