

MORE THAN 100 DEAD AS BANGLADESH INTENSIFIES WAR ON DRUGS

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DHAKA— More than 100 alleged drug dealers have been killed and thousands detained in Bangladesh in the past fortnight in a Philippines-style narcotics crackdown that has raised concerns about extrajudicial killings.

Police said 10 more alleged traffickers were gunned down in the early hours of Tuesday, some in shootouts with police and others in so-called gang wars between dealers.

Smash trade in 'yaba'

A total of 102 suspected traffickers have been killed since Bangladesh launched an aggressive war on drugs in mid-May to smash the surging trade in "yaba," a cheap pill combining methamphetamine and caffeine.

"We are saying that this war will continue until we bring it under complete control," Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Around 12,000 accused dealers have been arrested and tried in special courts since the crackdown began on May 15, with many handed jail sentences of seven days to six months, he added.

Khan said there was "no question" that those killed were drug dealers, despite allegations by rights groups that innocent people had died.

"Most of those who were killed had guns. They opened fire as soon as they saw the police," he said.

"They are not good people. There are 10 to 12 [criminal] cases against each of them."

But the National Human Rights Commission this week expressed "grave concern" at the mounting death toll and sounded the alarm over alleged extrajudicial killings.

No evidence provided

The Rapid Action Battalion, an elite police unit in charge of the sweep, said all 24 people killed by its forces were "top drug traders" but provided no evidence.

One of those killed was a councilor from Teknaf whom supporters say had no involvement with drugs.

The rest died in late-night shootouts with police or shootouts among themselves over turf and drugs, officials said.

Among those killed on Tuesday were two alleged kingpins apparently found dead by police after a so-called drug war in Jessore district, local police chief AKM Ajmal Huda told AFP.

"We found the bodies after the gunfight between two rival groups of drug traders," he said.

Bangladesh has struggled to contain the trade in yaba, with hundreds of millions of pills entering the country from Myanmar.

Authorities last year seized a record 40 million pills but said an estimated 250-300 million others entered the market.