

Wanted JMB militants hiding in Sundarbans

Raid soon to flush out militants and dismantle their bases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police and other law enforcing agencies are preparing to launch a special combing operation in some areas of the Sundarbans to bust hideouts of Islamic militants.

Wanted Islamist militants are hiding in the deep forest after arrest of JMB kingpins Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai, according to intelligence sources.

On June 17, 2001, Koira police in Khulna arrested six Islamist militants from the Sundarbans. They were Hafez Nuruzzaman alias Pintu Molla of Jessore, Abu Zafar alias Mehedi Hasan, Mohiuddin, Arif Hossain and Mostafa Kamal of Faridpur and Syed Mohammad Alam of Kushtia. They told police during interrogation that there were several secret camps in the forest where madrasa students were trained for a Taliban-style movement in the country.

Charge sheets against the six

militants were submitted to court on July 1, 2001. Charges against them were framed on December 18 in 2002. But magistrate Abdur Rahman of Koira upazila court dismissed the case on the same day. Later, the case docket was allegedly stolen from the court.

The six arrested militants also told police that Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai visited the camps in Sundarbans at least three times between 2001 and 2002 to monitor military training of 20 recruited madrasa students loyal to Islami Chhatra Shibir. This information was given by the six arrestees during interrogation.

Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai were helped by a section of officials in Koira to damage merit of several other cases. These led to establishment of JMB strongholds inside the Sundarbans, the intelligence sources said.

In 2004, police arrested 11 followers of Bangla Bhai from the Sundarbans and recovered from

their possession army uniforms and some books on militancy.

In May 2001, police arrested more 17 Islamist militants from near Rupsha bridge area.

Besides, police arrested JMB suicide bombers Rubel, Faruk, Hasan and Abul Bashir on December 25, 2003 from a room of an 'abandoned' hotel in Khulna city and recovered 150 booklets on Islamist militancy, 12 powerful bombs and a huge quantity of bomb making materials. The booklets recovered from there were edited by Shaekh Abdul Halim and printed from Ad-Din Publications, Dhaka.

The booklets contained guidelines on how to launch militant movement and hit targets with bombs and arms. A diary was also recovered from the spot which contained instructions for taking training in Karat and learn strategies to carry out suicide bomb attacks.

Four suicide bombers arrested from there had told police during interrogation that the abandoned

hotel in Khulna city was used as the main training centre of an Islamist militant organisation.

The area where the hotel is situated is a stronghold of Islami Chhatra Shibir, student front of ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami.

The intelligence sources said combing operation in the Sundarbans is deemed as urgent task now to track down the militants and extremists. They think that Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman had strengthened their networks in south-western districts from their bases in the Sundarbans.

The Islamist militants arrested from 2001 to 2004 and released on bail due to weak charge sheets are now being hunted by intelligence agencies, said the sources.

ELECTION OFFICES UNDER SIEGE



CLOCKWISE: Opposition activists in front of Election Commission offices in Satkhira, Barisal, Pabna and a CPB procession proceeding towards the office in Gaibandha during their countrywide programme to besiege EC yesterday.

Landless hold rally in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

About 5000 landless people at a rally at Bairagirchak in Kaligonj upazila yesterday demanded allotment of government (khas) lands to them in Debhata and Kaligonj upazilas.

The rally, organised by Kaligonj-Debhata Bhumihin Sangram Committee, was presided over by its president Wahab Ali Sardar.

Speakers there claimed that Khaleda Zia at a big public meeting at Devisahar football ground on August 8, 1998 had promised that khas lands would be distributed among landless people. But they did not get lands.

They blamed a section of government officials and so-called leaders of landless people for deceiving them.

They said over 357 landless families evicted from Bairagirchak, Sannasir Chak and Bosukhali areas are passing hard days.

BSF abducts 14 in a month from Chunarughat

10 yet to return: Bid to raise fence in no-man's land

SHAHIDUL ISLAM back from Habiganj

BRAHMANBARIA: Tension is mounting in the border in Rema and Bolia areas in Chunarughat upazila in Habiganj district as Indian Border Security Force (BSF) abducted 14 Bangladeshis nationals in last one month and continued its attempts to raise barbed wire fencing in no-man's land.

According to BDR sources, BSF intruded into Bangladesh territory on several occasions and abducted 14 people. After flag meetings, BSF returned four of them and 10 are yet to be handed over to them. Farmers in the area told this correspondent that they can not go to fields in border areas fearing abduction by

BSF.

BDR sources said, on January 25, some BSF personnel from their Barchaibari camp entered Bangladesh and chased several farmers working in field in Balunura village. They caught six Bangladeshis and dragged them to India.

The six Bangladeshi nationals were identified as Safique Mia, 35; Kanai Lal, 35; Kanu Tati, 30; Bhanku Santal, 45; Gachu, 30; and Gandha, 38. Earlier in the month BSF abducted three Bangladeshis from Tekarghat border area in Balla in Habiganj.

On February 10, BSF men from the same camp entered Moinalbil village in Gazipur union and took

away five people. They were Sankar Koiri, 17; Romonda, 12; Rajmahan Munda, 11; Ameer Ali, 32; and Moina Mia, 40. After several flag meetings, BSF returned four of them.

BSF also made several attempts to raise barbed wire fence and erect watchtowers on the no-mans land in the area near border pillars 1958, 1959, 1960 and 1962, BDR sources alleged.

At times BSF increases its strength, raising tension in the border, they alleged.

When contacted, Habiganj Deputy Commissioner MM Sultan Mahmud said he is aware of the situation and informed it to the appropriate authorities.

Facing Monga effectively

Pilot project showing signs of success

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

A pilot project for Monga alleviation, financed jointly by World Bank and the government has started to bring changes in the condition of poor families covered by it.

The authorities are now thinking to replicate the programme, official sources said.

The pilot project to fight Monga was introduced in one upazila each in Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat districts, covering about 7500 poor families.

Several lakh Monga affected families pass hard days during the pre-harvest period of September-October due to lack of work.

Five well reputed local non-government organizations- ASOD at Gangachhara in Rangpur, RDRS at Chilmari in Kurigram, SSS at Hatibandha in Lalmonirhat, POPIE at Jaldhaka in Nilphamari and GKS at Fulchhari in Gaibandha districts are implementing the pilot project since October last year.

These NGOs work as partners of Palli Karmo Sahayok Foundation (PKSF) and Social Development Foundation, two wings of the ministry of finance.

In Gangachhara, 15000 poor

women have been selected from 15 villages in Kolkond, Lakhitari, and Gaighanta unions.

They have been trained on income generating activities to make them self-reliant.

Each beneficiary was given a grant of Tk 2500 after training to run micro enterprises at their houses.

Seraful Islam, Programme Coordinator of ASOD, told this correspondent that all the beneficiaries under the programme are now busy with their income generating activities like goat rearing, poultry, homestead vegetable cultivation, weaving and producing yarn from old clothe.

These women will sell the resources during monga when their husbands and they will have no work in fields, he said. They will not be affected by monga in the next season, he said.

Afroza of Charisli village in Kolkond union in Gangachhara said she makes yarn from old clothe and sells those. "My family will not remain without food and work in the next monga season", she hoped.

Amna Begum of Char Motokpur said she is rearing about 200 poultry birds. Of these, 150 hens are laying eggs.

"I sell the eggs and deposit the money with ASOD so that I can spend from it in Aswin and Kartik (Bangla months when Monga prevails)."

Momena Begum of Joyram Ojha village said she is no more worried as she has 10 goats she bought with the grant.

But Seuli of Char Ichli wants more. "The amount of money they give is too small to run any trade successfully", she commented.

Khalilur Rahman, chairman of Gaighanta Union Parishad, said though the grant is small, he wants the programme to continue in Gangachhara.

Asked how the poor families covered by the pilot project will survive once they sell their goats and poultry, Seraful said they will be brought under mainstream programmes of NGOs and given micro-credit.

Executive Director of ASOD Tashkinur Rahman claimed that the pilot project will play an effective role in alleviating monga in northern districts.

The art of helping others to become self-reliant

Young girls learn and earn at Koli's handicraft factory

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Shamsiara Koli employs about 30 young girls—most of them students at her handicrafts factory.

The girls spend their leisure time gainfully at Koli's factory at a rented house at Shaibon in the town and each of them earn around Tk 1000 per month.

Koli trains them with care to making handicrafts, which are widely used now and will open up their prospects to be self-reliant, some of the girls told this correspondent during a visit.

"This not my business venture. I know the art and so have created an opportunity for others to earn something to meet their education expenses and to think for the future", the 30-year-old Koli said.

"My efforts have created confidence among many. This is my success", she said.

Koli knows the art of using her skill to make beautiful and attractive things including dolls from most ordinary things. Handicrafts produced at her factory include dolls, beautiful embroidery on fashionable garments and sarees, boutique, jute products like coloured and decorated wallmat, schoolbag and other decoration pieces. The products are supplied to other districts also.

A graduate of National University, Koli said she had fascination for handicrafts and sewing since then childhood.

Born and brought up in Rangpur town, she used to make women's dresses for free when she was a school student.

Then she learnt block printing, boutique and designing on clothe at

Shamsiara Koli at her factory with girls making handicrafts. She trained and employed 30 girls, most of them students, who now earn at least Tk 1000 a month.



PHOTO: STAR

the government-run Rangpur Youth Development Centre and started selling her products.

"As many as thirty women are doing part time job here. Most of them are college and university students. They work at home or at my workshop and earn money to meet their education expenses."

Like Koli, now there are around 30 enterprising women in Rangpur town.

Babi Chowdhury runs a similar handicraft workshop called Medha Bikash Kenro (centre for talent exposure).

Trained by Koli, Babi started her venture with Tk. 20,000. She said she employs about a dozen women and earns a small amount of profit.

All the workshops together employ around 600 women. But none of the women entrepreneurs got any financial assistance from any bank or NGO, Koli and Babi said.



Correction

In our story headlined 'Out for a decisive battle' published on page 6 on March 12, the photo published along that of Awami League leader Asaduzzaman Noor was not of BNP leader Shahriar Islam Tuhin. The above photo is of Tuhin. We regret the inadvertent computer error.

Rangpur BMA demands action against UNO

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

The Rangpur unit of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) at a press conference yesterday demanded action against Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Siddiqur Rahman for his alleged misbehaviour with the Civil Surgeon.

BMA leaders also threatened of agitation including strike at medical centres if their demand is not met within three days.

At the press conference at the BMA office, its leaders said Senior Jail Superintendent called a meeting of the Jail Committee at his office on January 8.

As per jail code, Civil Surgeon Tamsil Uddin was supposed to preside over the meeting as the Deputy Commissioner was on leave.

But as the Civil Surgeon took the chair, UNO Siddiqur Rahman asked him to leave it for him, saying the CS has no authority to preside over a meeting of the Jail Committee.

He also shouted at the CS and threatened to arrest him, the BMA leaders alleged.

After the incident, BMA leaders informed the district administration and sought action against the UNO, Rangpur BMA President Akmol Habib Choudhury said. But there was no action.

When contacted, UNO Siddiqur Rahman said he did not misbehave with the CS at the January 8 meeting.

"I simply requested him (CS) to leave the chair", the UNO said.



Afroza, right, producing thread from garments waste at Charisli village in Gangachhara upazila in Gaibandha.



PHOTO: STAR

ORDEALS FROM MINDLESS WORK...the partly dismantled Sakwa bridge (left), people carrying goods on heads and pushing a loaded rickshaw onto the Narsunda riverbank (right).

The agony bridge at Sakwa

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

The small river has dried up. But it is an uphill task to cross the Narsunda at Sakwa.

To carry goods or a patient in a rickshaw, at least 10 people are needed. They pull it from back with all strength when it slowly lands in the riverbed and then pushes it from behind to take it onto the bank.

Thousands of people in the area suffer as the old bridge at Sakwa, about 10 kilometres from Kishoreganj town, has been demolished for construction of a new one

without building a diversion road. The bridge is on the Chamma-Kishoreganj road, which is the only way to Itna, Mithamoin and Autogram upazilas in haor areas.

The old bridge was dismantled on February 25 by a Roads and Highways (R&H) contractor who is supposed to build the new bridge.

Following resentment and appeals by people, the contractor has finally started building the diversion road but the question remains whether it will be completed before the monsoon.

This correspondent during a recent visit saw farmers with goods

or fertiliser on rickshaws having tough time crossing the dried up river.

Roads and Highways (R&H) Assistant Engineer Uttam Kumar said the bridge will be constructed at a cost of Tk 3 crore 8 lakh and the work will be completed by December next year.

The bridge construction was scheduled to begin in December last year.

The R&H engineer however could not say anything why a diversion road was not built before demolition of the old bridge.