

Outlaws' den busted in Pabna shoal, one killed

13 firearms recovered, 19 arrested; raids to continue, says DIG

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Joint forces yesterday busted an outlaws' den in Dhalar Char, a remote shoal on the Jamuna in Pabna district.

Alleged outlaw Munna was killed in the shootout while the law enforcers arrested 19 suspected criminals and recovered 13 firearms, sources in the joint forces told newsmen. But the law enforcers could not say which

outlawed party Munna belonged to. Police said Munna faces several cases including five for murder.

Dhalar Char, surrounded by Jamuna tributaries, is about 60 kilometers from Pabna district town.

The remote shoal area was known as a den of outlaws and criminals who took shelter there as there was no action by law enforcers since 2000, the sources said. Outlaws belonging to the two factions

of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) took shelter there, intelligence reports said earlier.

Four hundred law enforcers including 52 members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and 40 army personal took part in the operation led by Pabna Additional District Magistrate Mahbubul Alam.

The operation was launched following intelligence reports from Pabna and Rajbari police.

The joint forces cordoned the area at about midnight on Saturday. Sensing law enforcers' presence, the criminals opened fire.

As law enforcers returned fire, Munna alias Robber Mona was killed. He was son of Nasir Ali of Shukchor village in Pabna Sadar upazila.

Law enforcers said most of the outlaws managed to flee as the escape routes are known to them.

"It was a well planned operation. Law enforcers cordoned the whole area and then raided houses to nab outlaws and criminals", DIG Rajshahi Region AKM Shahidul Haque told newsmen who visited the spot after raid. About 9000 people live in the big shoal. They are compelled to shelter outlaws and criminals, locals said.

Special operation will continue to arrest outlaws in the district, the DIG said.

The 13 recovered firearms include one rifle, a .22 (point two two) automatic gun, four foreign made revolvers, seven shutter guns and 66 bullets.

"As it is a remote area, there was no massive operation in last six years" Pabna Police Superintendent AFM Masum Rabbani told this correspondent.

The last raid was launched in 2000 when sub-inspector Hadaitulla of Pabna police was killed in shootout.

"The outlaws fled away but they may regroup there again", Pabna RabASP Tanvir Arafat said.



PHOTO: STAR

Firearms recovered from Dhalar Char, a remote Jamuna shoal in Pabna district, during a raid by joint forces yesterday.

ARRESTED JAMAAT LEADER IN PIROJPUR Party colleagues refuse to defend 'corrupt' Shafiq

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The party in power came as a magic lamp for Maolana Shafiqul Islam, secretary of Pirojpur district Jamaat-e-Islami and a close aide to party leader and former lawmaker Maolana Delwar Hossain Saidee.

Maolana Shafiq gained virtual control over the party unit and the administration during five years of alliance rule.

His overwhelming influence and power annoyed Pirojpur district Jamaat Amir Md. Tofazzal Hossain and created a rift in the party's local leadership, leading to factional clashes at times.

After his arrest last month, Jamaat leaders said they would not defend him for his 'misdeeds', party sources said while talking to this correspondent.

Joint forces arrested Shafiqul Islam on May 17 for his alleged corruption, toll collection, tender scam, misappropriation of government funds and sheltering criminals.

As a close aide to Delwar Hossain Saidee, Shafiq frequently visited different areas with the then lawmaker or for 'tadbir' but he was shown present at Kumarkhali Nesaria Mahmudia Senior Madrasa where he was a teacher.

Shafiq was the second son of Shahadat Hossain Howladar of Barokhali village under Zia Nagar upazila.

While a student at local Togra Madrasa, he came in contact with

Jamaat-controlled madrasa student organisation Jamiat-e-Talabae Arabia. When he became a madrasa teacher, he was made a member of Jamaat-controlled madrasa teachers' group Jamiat-e-Modarressin.

Maolana Shafiq was Assistant Mawlana at Kumarkhali Nesaria Mahmudia Senior Madrasa and superintendent of Talimul Quran Dakhil Madrasa of Saidee Foundation at Pirojpur town.

With support of Saidee, he became secretary of district Jamaat and was responsible for all development works in the district.

He also collected licenses as a contractor of LGED, district council, Upazila Parishad and PWD, sources said.

He created a syndicate with some firms and controlled all development works. This gave him the scope to collect commission by using the name of his party and the then lawmaker.

The sources claimed that he was responsible for implementation of about Tk 105.95 development works in Zia Nagar upazila and relief works involving Tk 2.24 crore.

Allegations have it that he also misappropriated funds from grants given by some Middle East countries for orphans at Parehnut Dighir Par Madrasa and Orphanage and other grants for Madinatul Ulum Kalaia Madrasa, Boudubi Nurani Madrasa and some other institutions.

He was also in control of government's mass education programme

in Pirojpur, which gave him the opportunity to appoint Jamaat-Shibir activists as teachers at mass education centers by taking commission from them, the sources claimed.

He also misappropriated funds of Islamic Foundation, sanctioned for madrasa-based child education centres and Quran-learning centers by giving fake lists.

Being a madrasa teacher and a member of low income family, Shafiq earned cores of taka during the 4-party alliance rule, the sources alleged.

He owns a three-storied luxurious house and a clinic in Pirojpur district town. He also purchased around 25 acres of land in the district and some buses and microbuses in last five years.

His transport business in Dhaka is supervised by his brother-in-law Mohammad Ali.

Local people also alleged that all development works in Pirojpur district during the alliance government rule were concentrated in areas of either Maolana Shafiq, Saidee or Jamaat-Shibir leaders.

When contacted, Shafiqul Islam's wife Sadia Islam said joint forces can arrest any body for any reason. She claimed that all allegations against her husband were baseless and false.

Anti-corruption body formed in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A new anti-corruption organisation has been floated here.

The new organisation titled, 'Durniti Protirodhe Samajik Andolone, Moulvibazar,' a social movement to prevent corruption, was floated aiming at helping the authorities concerned to combat corruption from society by creating consciousness against corruption and corrupt people.

The body was floated at a meeting held at a local community centre here on Saturday evening. Freedom fighter AK Suzaul Karim presided the meeting.

Among others, freedom fighters Dewan Abdul Wahab Chaudhury and Dewan Abul Khair Chowdhury, Principal Maya Wahed, businessman Tareque Ahmed and Shamim Ahmed, Engineer Muazzem Hussain, journalists Abdul Hamid Mahub and Syed Md Atahar addressed the meeting.

Later, a 11-member convening committee with freedom fighter AK Sujaul Karim as its convener was formed.

Dewan Abdul Wahab Chowdhury, one of the organisers, told The Daily Star they will implement their programme through posters and organising seminar, drama and other cultural activities.

Tornado lashes 5 Lalmonirhat villages: 30 hurt

A CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

At least 30 people were injured when a tornado lashed five villages of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila yesterday morning.

The tornado which was accompanied by hailstorm swept over Indrar Par, Sindurmoti, Panchogram, Barobari and Ram Dash villages at a speed of about 85 kilometre per hour. It lasted for 20 minutes.

About 500 houses were damaged, crops on a vast tract of land ruined, thousands of trees and five electric polls uprooted.

Electric supply and telecommunications were disrupted in the affected areas.

Roofs of three schools, two madrasas, a mosque and a temple were blown away at villages Sindurmoti and Indrar Par.

Sources in the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) said maize on about 1,00 hectares of land and Boro paddy on 50 hectares of land were damaged.

On contact, Deputy Director (DD) of DAE Aftab Uddin Khan confirmed the report.

Critically injured Miah, 40, Samsul Alam, 30, Raziya Begum, 25, of Indrar Par village, Haripado Roy, 55, Minal Roy, 12, Uzzal Kumar, 20, of Sindur Moti village, Tahela Begum, 36, Joyal Miah, 40, Karim Sarker, 60, of village Panchogram were undergoing treatment at Lalmonirhat and Kurigram hospitals.

Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rafiqul Islam and Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) KM Ali Newaz visited the villages.



MORSHED ALI KHAN

Awed crowds watch Madhumala touching the shoreline after crossing Lohalia river in Patuakhali carrying a huge bundle of banana plants in its trunk and its mahuth on the back.

MORSHED ALI KHAN and SOHRAB HOSSAIN in Patuakhali

At around noon on Thursday a crowd of around 100 men, women and children stood by the river Lohalia in Patuakhali and looked eagerly towards the middle of the river.

The crowd watched in amazement as Madhumala, an elephant belonging to the visiting circus party, swam across the carrying a huge load of banana trees with its trunk.

The mahut (caretaker) sat on her back slowly tapping her shoulder with a shiny stick to steer towards the bank. As soon as she touched the bank, the crowd clapped in further amazement. Madhumala was carrying a load of over 20 full-grown banana plants. Soon the mahut most skillfully guided the animal towards its pen nearby where her mate Mohonmala stood patiently.

Every single day since May 9 people of Patuakhali and adjacent villages have been watching Madhumala and Mohonmala shuttle across the Lohalia in quest of food. The animals are valuable members of the Royal Bengal Lakkhan Das Circus, one of the oldest circus teams in the country founded in 1947 and currently running daily shows at Patuakhali PDSA playground.

For thousands of rural men, women and children, it brings a treat of joy and amusement. For the performers who everyday try to entertain audiences in this southern district, life is not that easy. Since this circus was founded, hundreds of other circus teams became extinct in the country. Members of the Royal Bengal Lakkhan Das Circus are now losing hope for a stable future. They are afraid they might have to give up what they learnt from their ancestors. There has never been an effort by the government or the civil society to save the culture of circus, the performers lamented.

The founder of the circus Lakkhan Das of Charchi village under Gournadi upazila in Barisal district was not so lucky either. Freedom fighter Lakkhan was brutally killed by the Pakistani occupational forces during the liberation war in 1971.

His circus party suffered a severe blow when the brutal forces also killed his elephant, tiger and bear. With his death and the deaths of his animal companions, Lakkhan's circus was shut down in 1971 for a year.

After the war Lakkhan's two sons Arun Das and Beran Das started reorganising the party. Today the Royal Bengal Lakkhan Das circus employs 110 athletes, acrobats and stuntmen, women, children, assistants and officials. Royal Bengal's animal pens now

TALE OF THE OLDEST CIRCUS IN PATUAKHALI Life becoming too hard for both acrobats, animals

boast of two elephants, two bears, two goats, two donkeys and a dog. Each animal is trained to perform a specific show.

Madhumala can play football and Mohonmala can seat on a tiny bench. The two goats entertain the audiences doing a delicate walk on a thin steel plate. Bears toss and revolve a 10 feet long steel pipe.

The breathtaking motorbike rides in a vertical cage greatly entertains the people. The list of events goes further with the ring dance of a young girl, horse's jump through a fire ring and the clown eating a live scorpion.

Every member of the circus party has a fixed monthly salary. So far, Royal Bengal Lakkhan Das circus has been able to ensure a minimum salary ranging from Tk 1,200 Tk 6,000 for each of its member. The company also ensures a steady diet twice a day for its members.

"We try to supply balanced diet for every athlete and stuntman and woman to protect their health and strength," Beran Das, director of the party said.

Beran said that only five out of 14 circus parties in the country are now operating. The Royal Bengal Lakkhan Das Circus of Gournadi, Lion Circus and Lax

Narayan Circus in Dhaka, New Star Circus in Comilla and Rawshan Circus in Rangpur are still trying to survive amid all odds. Many big names in the sector have vanished over the years, Baren said.

Satyendra Nath Mondal, manager of the party said this year they were lucky enough to hold three month-long shows in Narail, Banaripara and Barisal.

The circus parties in the country suffered a fresh blow when the government banned shows following the countrywide bomb blasts. "Over the last four years we suffered badly because of bombings," said Mondal.

Hard work of the members of the Royal Bengal Lakkhan Das circus was paid off in 1980 when it won a national prize for best performance. Late President Ziaur Rahman handed over the prize.

In order to improve performance there should be exchanges between the local and foreign circus parties, said Das. "If we are given a little incentive, we could earn prestige for the country abroad," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

The Brahmaputra is devouring lands in Baguria village in Gaibandha Sadar upazila while concrete blocks made for protection of its bank are lying unutilised.

Brahmaputra devours villages as river bank protection delayed

REZAUL HAQ, Gaibandha

The Water Development Board (WDB) did not start Brahmaputra river bank protection work at Baguria and Sayedpur despite release of Tk 8.92 crore in the current financial year.

Concrete blocks made for dumping in the vulnerable area are lying near the site. WDB sources said the authorities were supposed to release the allocated fund of Tk 13.40 crore in the current financial year to dump concrete blocks and

do other renovation work along 500 meters of the bank in Baguria and Sayedpur on priority basis but they did not release the total fund.

The sources said the work was suspended as partial dumping of concrete blocks will not be effective.

"We dropped the programme for the time being and will begin work next year, if funds are available", said the Gaibandha WDB Executive Engineer when contacted.

Meanwhile, a team of IWTA last week started 'water model test' in the project area and it will submit a

report on sustainable bank protection, he added.

As WDB failed to start the work, erosion by Brahmaputra has taken an alarming turn in Baguria and Sayedpur areas following increase of water level, locals said.

Unabated erosion is threatening Gaibandha town, which is now only three and half kilometres from the erosion point.

The erosion has intensified along the western bank of the river. At least 300 houses were devoured by the river in Fulchari, Shaghata and

Gaibandha Sadar upazilas in about a week.

The Katlamari Government Primary School in Fulchari collapsed into the river in a couple of days. People in vulnerable areas were seen shifting their houses.

The erosion-hit villages include Hashdhar, Kharjani, Chithulia Digor, Mollar Char, Baguria, Sayedpur, Balashi and Khatiyamari.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Children catching fish with bare hands in dried up Padma near Rajshahi city.