

Pirates introduce 'tokens' each for Tk 10,000 for 'safe' fishing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Rampant looting, abduction for ransom and introduction of so-called 'token system' by pirate gangs has become a threat to fishermen in the Bay of Bengal during the peak hilsa season.

After committing a few large-scale piracy recently, criminals are forcing trawler owners to buy 'token' or 'card' for Tk 10,000 for each trawler as condition for 'safe fishing' in the deep sea during the hilsa catching season till November, said several fishermen and trawler owners.

A fisherman showed this correspondent a 'card' that he collected from a pirate gang after meeting their demand. 'Bhai Bhai Joutho Fish' is written on the 'card' that also contains pictures of a buffalo and a rose. Besides, there is '786' printed on top of the card.

In last several days, pirates looted

nets, hilsa, fuel and cash worth about Tk two crore from around 40 trawlers in the bay and abducted 50 fishermen. Many of them later returned to Kuakata and Pathorghata areas after buying freedom for good amounts.

On August 24, a pirates' gang attacked five trawlers and abducted 10 fishermen about 80 kilometres to the south of Kuakata. The gang also looted hilsa, fuel and cash worth over Tk five lakh from the trawlers, Abdul Latif, one of the 12 fisherman who returned to Mohipur area the next morning told local journalists and trawler owners.

On August 22, an armed gang attacked at least 25 trawlers and abducted 26 fishermen about 120 kilometres to the south of Pathorghata upazila in Barguna district. During the attack pirates killed one fisherman and shot 16 more. Five of the bullet-hit fishermen were able to reach Pathorghata by a

trawler while 11 others are still missing. Pirates looted hilsa fishes, fuel and cash. Later a fishing trawler rescued 26 fishermen who were floating on the Bay.

Early on August 20, another gang kidnapped 15 people from 10 fishing trawlers about 50 kilometres to the south-east of Pathorghata. Pirates brought them to the Sundarbans and later released for Tk 5,000 each as ransom, said fishermen who returned to Pathorghata from Sundarbans two days after their abduction.

The pirates often keep abducted fishermen at their camps in the Sundarbans and release them for ransom, said a fisherman.

Following the incidents, many panicked fishermen are returning with trawlers to Pathorghata from deep sea, said Golam Mostafa Chowdhury, president of Barguna Fishing Trawler Owners Association.

Quite a few trawler owners have collected 'token' from the pirate gangs to ensure safety for their men and goods, sources said.

Fishermen feel insecure to go to the Bay as Julfiqar Bahini and Raju Bahini, two pirate gangs of the Sundarbans, are active in the bay in the running hilsa season, said Fazlu Gazi, president of trawler owners association in Mohipur.

Two pirates were killed in a gunfight with the joint forces of coastguard, Rapid Action Battalion and police on July 8 this year in Baleswar River in Pathorghata upazila of Barguna district.

"Despite shortage of speedy vessels, we are making preparations to conduct drives against pirates in the bay very soon," a coastguard official in Pathorghata told this correspondent over cell phone.



Remains of felled trees under Charkai Range Forest comprising Charkai Forest Research Centre in Birampur upazila of Dinajpur district bear testimony to utter vulnerability of the valuable forest resources.



PHOTO: STAR

Jhinai River, a tributary of the Jamuna, continues devouring areas in Adajan village in Basail upazila of Tangail district, much to the worry of locals. The photo was taken a few days ago.

Notorious pirate arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Pirate arrested a notorious pirate of the Sundarbans on Saturday night from near Mohsin High School under Daulatpur police station of Khulna city.

Arrestee Saidur Rahman Saeed, 40, is son of Abed Ali of Gilatala area under Khanjahan Ali police station in the city.

SI Tarikul Islam of detective branch said that the pirate was wanted in a gun looting case recorded with Khulna Sadar police station on December 12 in 2008.

Tarikul, who is investigating the case, said a gang of five pirates led by Saidur on that day committed robbery in the house of prominent fish exporter Khan Shafiqullah alias Khokon of Shamsur Rahman Road in the city.

According to FIR, the pirates looted a brand new seven shooter gun, 100 bullets, gold ornaments weighing 12 tolas and a sum of Tk 1,50,000 confining the house members to a room at gunpoint.

The fish exporter, who was severely injured in the attack by pirates, later filed a case with Khulna Sadar police station.

Police during investigation of the case arrested four pirates from different places of Khulna and Bagerhat districts.

In their statements to court in July last year the four confessed to their involvement in the robbery headed by ringleader Saidur Rahman.

SI Tarikul further said that there are over 50 cases against Saidur with different police stations of Bagerhat district for piracies committed in the Sundarbans and coastal belts in the last five years.

Worrying days for people by River Jhinai in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

People of different villages beside the Jhinai River in Basail upazila of Tangail district are passing days amid worry due to river erosion.

About one thousand people of 12 villages including Adajan, Ekdhala, Dohar, Ranagachha, Dapnazar, Kamutia, Kasil, Balina, Bilpara and Kazirpara under Fulki, Kasil, Habla and Kanchanpur unions in the upazila are facing serious river erosion threat due to rise of water level in the river.

Jhinai River, a tributary of the mighty Jamuna, also caused serious erosion in the

same areas during the last year's monsoon.

However, the river has turned more furious this year and has already devoured about one hundred dwelling houses, several educational institutions, vegetable gardens and fruit orchards, and vast tracks of agricultural lands in the villages during the monsoon.

Many of the riverside families have already left their houses and taken shelter in safe places while many others are passing days under the opensky.

During this correspondent's visit to erosion-affected Adajan village in Basail recently, the affected people

expressed their deep concern over the gradual erosion.

Many villagers including Abu Sayed, Abdul Malek, Menhaz Uddin, Somesh Uddin, Abdur Rafik, Tula Miah, Abdur Rashid, Mamun Miah, Shukur Miah, Munshi Hasan Ali, Mansoor Rahman and Mazibor Rahman said they have lost their houses due to the recent erosion by Jhinai River.

Most part of traditional KBN Bahumukhi High School in the upazila has already gone into the riverbed. Besides, a bazaar and a bridge adjacent to the school may also go to the riverbed any moment, locals said.

Abu Sayed Khan of erosion

affected Adajan village said, "Although the people suffer a lot due to river erosion by Jhinai River every year, the authorities concerned never take necessary measures to check the erosion. Several riverside villages may disappear from the map of the upazila."

When contacted, Riazul Hasan, executive engineer of Tangail Water Development Board, said, "We have no fund to check the river erosion. We have written to the higher authorities for providing necessary fund for the purpose. The works to check the erosion can be started after getting the fund."





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