



Abu Bakar Siddique talking to investigators at the spot in Fatullah, Narayanganj, from where he was abducted on Wednesday. Siddique and his wife Syeda Rizwana Hasan leaving Dhanmondi Police Station after his abductors released him late Thursday night.

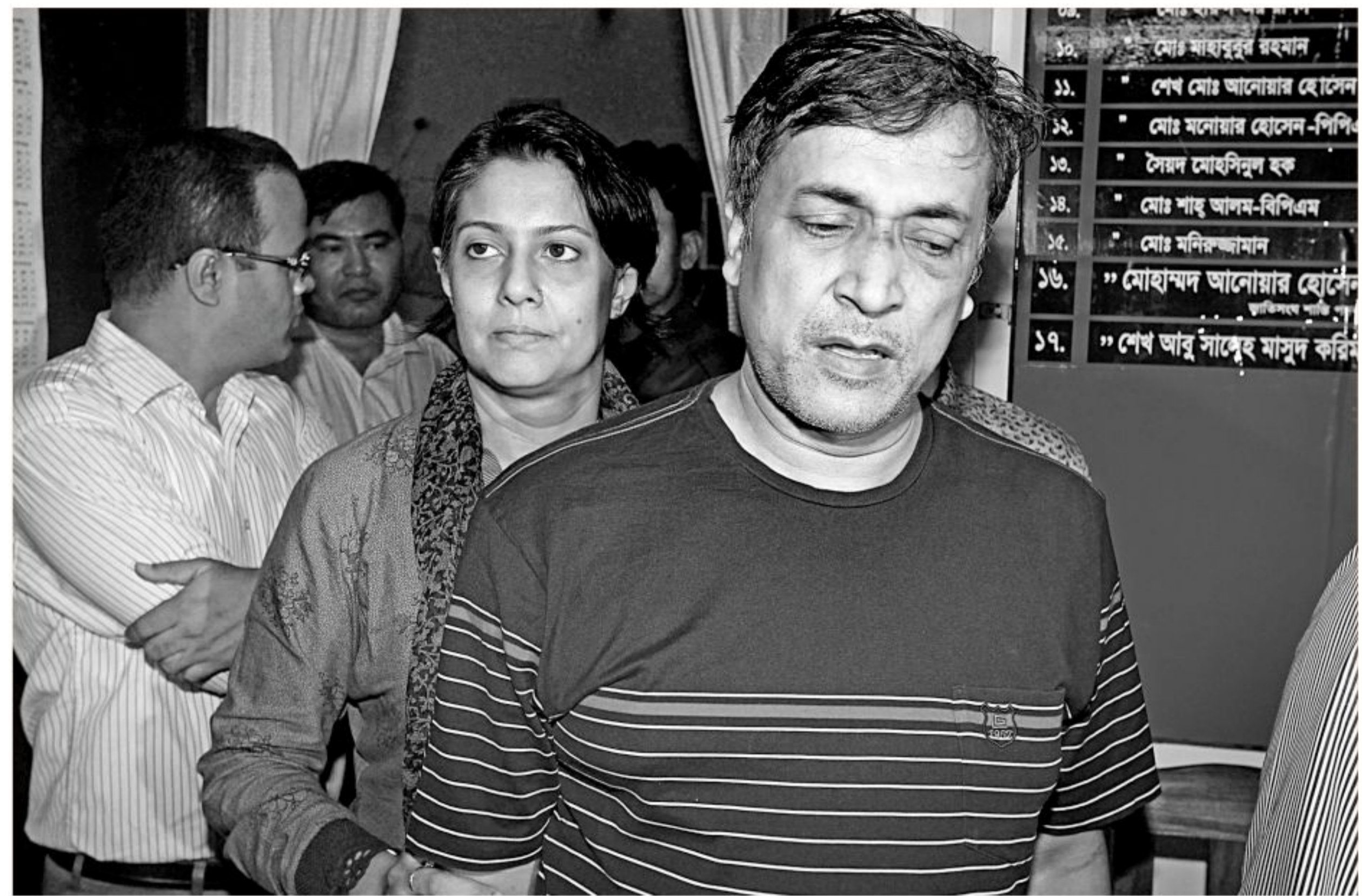


PHOTO: STAR

Any land-related case your wife filed?

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gunpoint on Dhaka-Narayanganj link road around 2:40pm on Wednesday. And it all happened in two to three minutes.

The abductors blindfolded him and shoved him into a microbus. They warned him not to make any noise.

The vehicle travelled for an hour or more before it got onto a ferry. "They changed the vehicle before boarding the second ferry," he said.

On the way, they didn't ask him anything. But he heard them discussing the amount of ransom -- from Tk 4 lakh to Tk 1 crore -- for his release.

The vehicle didn't stay on highways all the time.

"Sometimes, it ran smoothly on highways. And at times, it travelled battered roads," he said.

The vehicle reached the house before Maghrib prayers.

"They took me inside the house and put a rope around my neck. Then I felt something, probably the barrel of a revolver, pushed against my abdomen. They warned me not to scream or make noise if I wanted to stay alive. But they did not torture me. I was blindfolded the whole time," he said.

Siddique said the gang leader arrived at the house after a few hours. And the persons on guard there addressed him as "bhai".

"Bhai stayed there for only five minutes."

"It seems you are quite a famous person. You have created so much stir in the media. We might get a ransom of Tk 10 crore from your family. We have not yet decided what to do with you. We will either shoot you or release you," said Siddique, quoting the gang leader.

"Bhai" asked Siddique his name and also enquired about his profession, apparently trying to give an impression that the gang leader didn't know much about him.

"I told him to let me talk to my family if they wanted money. But he did not allow it. He also didn't ask for any phone number."

"They did not misbehave with me. He [bhai] asked his people to buy me medicine for high blood pressure," said Siddique.

He had to lie on the floor the whole night.

They gave me a bun and a banana for breakfast the next morning, said Siddique.

"After breakfast, I started talking to them to know their intentions."

The two persons on guard told him that possibly the abductors would not kill him.

But they mentioned that some of the abductees had been killed there, said Siddique.

"I asked the two why they were doing such work. They said they did it only for money," he said.

Asked how he kept track of time, Siddique said he needed to take medicine after the Esha prayers the second day. When he wanted to know the time from one of the two on guard there, the person told him that it was 9:20pm.

The gang leader arrived there after a while and told Siddique that police and Rab members had got very active.

"It is not safe to keep you here anymore. It is not wise to kill you as your dead body will not fetch me money. I better release you. May be I will be able to get money from you later," said Siddique, quoting the gang leader.

Later, he was put inside a car. The gang leader himself drove it for around an hour. He then stopped near the Ansar camp in Mirpur, gave Siddique Tk 300 and then released him around

Questions go unanswered

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A gang of six to seven, on a blue microbus, were following Siddique's red saloon since he left Hamid Fashion. The microbus knocked the car from behind near Firoz Filling Station in Bhuigarh area.

As Siddique and his driver Ripon got down from the car to check the damage, the miscreants hit Ripon in the head with a revolver, sprayed pepper over his face and dragged Siddique onto the microbus. It all happened within a few minutes.

And the way he was freed is also shrouded in mystery.

In the wake of intense pressure from the law enforcers and the media, the kidnappers left him blindfolded near Ansar Camp in Mirpur around 11:20pm on Thursday, and even gave him Tk 300. He hired a rickshaw from there to come to Kazipara from where he took a CNG-run auto-rickshaw to reach home.

Police later spotted him near Kalabagan on his way home around midnight yesterday, and took him to Dhanmondi Police Station. He later went to his Central Road home from there.

During yesterday's press briefing, Siddique said the abductors blindfolded him, tied his hands and legs and covered his face with a piece of cloth as soon as they forced him into the microbus.

"The abductors were aged around 35 and were well-built. Their height would be more or less the same, about 5 feet 7 inches," he said.

One of them, unlike the others, was well-dressed. "This man pointed the gun at me and forced me into the microbus."

Siddique told The Daily Star that the gang leader seemed to be educated, but not the other ones who guarded him at the house.

The house could be somewhere in Gazipur, he said, adding that during his captivity one guard asked him if his

wife had any dispute with anyone over land-relates issues.

Rizwana said the abductors tried to conceal their motive and their identities by asking the name and the profession of her husband.

The Bela chief said she gave some names to the law enforcers in connection with the abduction.

"All of them are influential people," she said, declining to disclose the names.

Asked if she negotiated with the law enforcers for her husband's release, she said, "One has to negotiate when there is an issue. But I have no issues. My concern was to get back my husband alive."

After the incident, she said, none of her family members was feeling safe. "I hope our security would be ensured from the state level."

SIDDIQUE GIVES DEPOSITION
Abu Bakar Siddique yesterday gave deposition before a magistrate in Narayanganj about his abduction.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Begum Chandni Rupam recorded the statement.

He later told reporters that he could not give much information about the abductors or the place he was taken to as he was kept blindfolded all the time.

He reached the court premises along with his wife around 12:30pm.

Earlier around 11:00am, the couple went to the office of Narayanganj Superintendent of Police Syed Nurul Islam by a police car, where a doctor examined Siddique.

After the check-up, the doctor, Sheikh M Forhan, said he found marks of bruise around his eyes, on his nose and wrists as he was blindfolded and his hands were tied.

On their next move, the SP said they would continue the investigation.

Asked why Siddique was kidnapped, he said, "It is too early to make a comment on the motive."

Nigeria admits most kidnapped schoolgirls still missing

AFP, Maiduguri

The Nigerian military yesterday admitted that most of the 129 girls abducted by Boko Haram Islamists in a shocking school raid in the country's restive northeast remained missing.

A security source said there were fears the girls were being used as human shields or sex slaves by the Islamists.

The military had claimed on Wednesday that all but eight of the girls snatched from their school in the state of Borno managed to escape the gunmen's clutches, contrary to comments by the state government and the school principal.

"The defence headquarters wishes to defer to the school principal and governor's statement on the number of students still missing," defence ministry spokesman Chris Olukolade said in a statement.

He said vigilante groups and hunters were assisting the authorities in the frantic search for the girls, who were grabbed from the Government Girls Secondary School in the Chibok area of Borno late Monday.

Borno state education commissioner said that 30 girls had now escaped from the Islamists.

"At the moment we have taken custody of 30 girls," Mallam Inuwa

Kubo said in a statement.

"The aim is for us to take proper account of our 129 students who were at the hostel on the day of that unfortunate attack," he said.

"By our records, of 129 students at the hostel at the time of that unfortunate incident, we are expecting the return of about 99 students."

The mass abduction sparked global outrage and came just hours after the deadliest attack to hit the capital Abuja, where a bomb blast also blamed on Boko Haram killed at least 75 people.

PARENTS SCOUR BUSH

Boko Haram's extremist uprising, aimed at creating a strict Islamic state in northern Nigeria, has killed thousands of people since 2009.

Parents of the missing girls swarmed the home of Chibok's tribal chief on Thursday, demanding answers after the military claimed the girls were free, residents said.

Others decided to scour the remote area in a desperate search for girls who may have escaped. "Some of our parents are even combing the bush," Kwambura said, adding that families had pooled money to buy fuel for motorcycles and other vehicles to help with the search.

Boko Haram's name loosely translates as "Western education is forbid-

den" and the group has repeatedly attacked schools and universities.

Students have been massacred in their dormitories and bombs set off at university campuses, but the mass abduction specifically targeting girls is unprecedented.

A top security officer said the girls might have been abducted by the Islamists to serve as human shields, domestic helpers and sex slaves.

"The terrorists are desperate for survival. The military offensive is taking a heavy toll on their rank and file," the officer, who did not want to be named, told AFP.

"The female hostages are being used as shield during battles with the military. Some serve as cooks and many more as sex slaves," he said.

Borno's governor has offered a 50 million naira (\$300,000, 216,000 euro) reward to anyone with information leading to the return of the schoolgirls.

President Goodluck Jonathan met his security chiefs on Thursday to review the latest unrest and another security meeting has been set for next week.

Violence by Boko Haram insurgents has cost more than 1,500 lives already this year, the deadliest stretch in the five-year uprising.

Japan to redesign Antarctic whale hunt

AFP, Tokyo

Japan yesterday said it would redesign its controversial Antarctic whaling mission in a bid to make it more scientific, after a United Nations court ruled it was a commercial hunt masquerading as research.

The bullish response, which could see harpoon ships back in the Southern Ocean next year, sets Tokyo back on a collision course with environmentalists.

Campaigners had hailed the decision by the International Court of Justice, with hopes that it might herald the end of a practice they view as barbaric.

"We will carry out extensive studies in cooperation with ministries concerned to submit a new research programme by this autumn to the International Whaling Commission

(IWC), reflecting the criteria laid out in the verdict," said Yoshimasa Hayashi, minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

Japan, a member of the IWC, has hunted whales under a loophole allowing for lethal research. It has always maintained that it was intending to prove the whale population was large enough to sustain commercial hunting.

But it never hid the fact that the by-product of whale meat made its way onto menus.

"The verdict confirmed that the (IWC moratorium) is partly aimed at sustainable use of whale resources.

"Following this, our country will firmly maintain its basic policy of conducting whaling for research, on the basis of international law and scientific foundations, to collect

scientific data necessary for the regulation of whale resources, and aim for resumption of commercial whaling."

Hayashi, who had met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe earlier in the day, confirmed an earlier announcement that the 2014-15 hunt in the Southern Ocean would not go ahead.

Last month's court ruling does not apply to Japan's two other whaling programmes: a "research" hunt in coastal waters and in the northwestern Pacific, and a much smaller programme that operates along the coast, which is not subject to the international ban.

PACIFIC HUNT 'SCALED BACK'

Hayashi said the northwestern Pacific hunt, which is due to depart Japanese shores on April 26, would continue, albeit in a slightly reduced form.

Strike cannot be means

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"Who will pay for our stay in Dhaka for more days? Will the doctors do?" said an angry Ruhul while leaving the hospital on April 16.

The Birdem's is not a unique case.

On March 27 this year, all the public and private hospitals in Rajshahi enforced a strike after a court denied bail to a doctor and sent him to jail in a murder case. The case was filed following the death of a businessman at a private clinic in Rajshahi city less than half an hour after he was taken to operating theatre for a surgery on his fractured right leg on January 30.

During the two-day strike, at least one patient died allegedly for not getting treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

At least 10 such strikes were enforced by doctors last year alone and around 50 incidents of assaults on physicians and other health professionals happened during the same time, said Dr Mohammad Jamaluddin Chowdhury, executive member of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA).

He too thinks that doctors should refrain from enforcing strikes.

"While strikes by doctors is not acceptable, attacks on doctors or whimsical criminal cases against them or arresting them before proving allegations are also totally unexpected," said Jamaluddin, who is also a disciplinary committee member of Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BM&DC).

The BM&DC, the regulatory body of the physicians, can cancel the registration of a physician in case of negligence. But none filed any complaint with the council in the last three years, he told The Daily Star.

Dr Rashid-E-Mahbub, ombudsman of Birdem hospital, said doctors may show negligence and one may complain to the BM&DC, but in no way

they can assault doctors.

There should also be a legal provision prohibiting work abstention by doctors, he suggested.

"As no legal provision is there and none follows the rules already in place, both the doctors and the complainants are going for extreme measures. This is unacceptable," he said.

Sharifuzzaman, general secretary of rights body Nagorik Sanghati, said doctors should keep in mind that they have a much bigger responsibility than other professionals.

"However, doctors at present don't seem tolerant enough. In Birdem's case, they went for work abstention even before taking legal measures or waiting for the findings of the probe committee formed by the Birdem authorities," he told The Daily Star.

Such moves suggest that the doctors want to realise their demands by victimising the patients, he said, adding that such "abuse of their power" is deplorable.

Echoing Sharifuzzaman, Dr Abdul Matin, formerly a medical practitioner and now a citizen rights activist, said doctors are expected to show more tolerance and patience as they deal with people in urgent needs.

"However, it is regrettable that these behavioural issues are not given much importance in Bangladesh. Better communications between the doctors and the patients can minimise such misunderstandings," he told The Daily Star.

Dr Deen Mohammad Nurul Haque, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said doctors may choose other forms of protests if they have grievances but should never go for work abstention.

Russia to 'boost military presence' on disputed Kurils

AFP, Moscow

Russia will build new military compounds in the next two years on the Kuril islands that are the subject of a territorial row with neighbouring Japan, a top commanders said yesterday.

"The decisions on constructing military base settlements on the islands Iturup and Kunashir have been taken and confirmed," the commander of Russia's Far Eastern military district Sergei Surovikov said, Russian agencies reported.

"All the main objects, and there are more than 150 of them, will be completed before 2016," he added.

Troops deployed on the two islands, which Japan considers its territory despite them being claimed by the Soviets in the final days of World War II, will also receive additional equipment, he said.

"The rearmament of the district's military bases located on Sakhalin island and the Kuril islands, is ongoing," he said. "This year we plan to receive 120 more armoured, special, and automobile equipment," he said.

Relations between Moscow and Tokyo have been strained for decades because of the status of southernmost four of the Pacific islands known as the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan.

Vietnam says 7 killed in shooting on China border

AFP, Hanoi

Seven people were killed in a gun battle between border guards and Chinese illegal migrants at a remote frontier crossing in northeast Vietnam, authorities said yesterday.

Sixteen Chinese nationals -- 10 men, four women and two children -- were detained early Friday after attempting to enter Vietnam, the Quang Ninh provincial government said in a statement.

While authorities were preparing to send them back, "some Chinese men in this group seized guns from Vietnamese border guards and shot at them... killing one guard on the spot," the statement said.

Vietnamese and Chinese authorities sought to calm the situation but the migrants refused to drop their weapons and a firefight erupted, it added.

2 people freed

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10:45pm.

The abductors released them unhurt, said Mostafa Kamal, officer-in-charge of Naniachar Police Station.

The kidnappers after abducting them on Monday called their families over the mobile phone demanding Tk 1.60 crore in ransom. The families negotiated with the abductors and they had agreed to let the two go for Tk 10 lakh.

OC Mostafa Kamal claimed that the abductors were forced to release them without getting any ransom due to mounting pressure from law enforcers.

On Monday, Sourav and Nabajit were returning to Rangamati on a CNG-run auto-rickshaw from Khagrachhari town after celebrating Biju festival there.

A gang of armed criminals kidnapped them at gunpoint from Kengalchhari around 3:00pm.

The OC said a case was filed in connection with the kidnapping on Wednesday.

The army, Border Guard Bangladesh and police had launched drives in Rangamati and Khagrachhari looking for Sourav and Nabajit, sources claimed.

The army detained three people in this connection, including a driver of an auto-rickshaw, and handed them over to Naniachar police, said the OC.