

Bamboo-made watchtower to check robbery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Locals have set up two bamboo-made watchtowers to tackle robbery in remote char areas on the Teesta river basin in Sundarganj upazila.

Robbery is a common incident in the char areas during the rainy season. Most of the char areas go under floodwater. Robbers become active at that time as they can easily go from one place to another by engine-run boats.

The flood-affected people are compelled to take shelter on higher ground or flood control embankments with their belongings, including cattle.

Robbers attack the flood victims and loot their valuables.

At least six robberies had happened in different places of Kapasia, Sreepur and Haripur unions before the watchtowers were set up.

The criminals were committing the crime even in broad daylight, said locals of Kapasia union.

Considering the plight of the char people, Gaibandha-1 lawmaker

Monjurul Islam Liton has financially helped the locals set up the watchtowers, each of which is 30-feet high, in the char areas of Kapasia and Haripur unions.

With their physical labour, locals have set up the towers. At least 10 people can stay on a tower at a time for observing movement of robbers' boats. They blow whistles to alert people if they see any such boat coming.

"We do our duties round the clock by rotation. At night, we run searchlights by using solar panels," said Mokbul Hossain, one of them who guards against robbery.

After setting up of the watchtowers, no robbery occurred here, said Somesh Ali of Haripur river ghat.

Locals said those towers somewhat relieved their anxiety over robbery.

Lawmaker Monjurul Islam gave the money from the Test Relief (TR) programme for setting up the two towers, said Nurunnabi Sarker, project

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Residents of Sundarganj upazila in Gaibandha have set up a watchtower in Badamerchar to check robbery in the area. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

Verdict today in Jessore war crimes case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 is set to deliver verdict today in a case against nine Jessore men, including former Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP lawmaker Shakhawat Hossain, in connection with crimes committed during the Liberation War.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice Anwarul Haque with members Justice Md Shahinur Islam and Justice Md Shohrawardi fixed the date 26 days after it had completed trial of the case.

Earlier on July 14, the tribunal kept the case waiting for delivering judgment.

The accused are facing five charges of crimes including killing and rape. Wrapping up their closing arguments, the prosecution prayed for capital punishment of the accused saying all five charges have been proved. On the other side, the defence prayed for acquittal of their clients saying the prosecution failed to prove a single charge.

All the accused hailed from Keshabpur upazila in Jessore. Apart from Shakhawat, who is now involved with Jatiya Party, Billal Hossain Biswas is also behind bars. Another accused Lutfar Morol died of old age complications in May this year.

The other accused -- Ibrahim Hossain, Mujibur Rahman, Kazi Ohidul Islam, Aziz Sardar, Aziz Sardar and Abdul Khaleq Morol -- are on the run.

The prosecution on July 26 last year pressed charges against 12 people over the killing of two persons, rape of one and torture on two others in the Bangla month of Ashwin (between mid-September and mid-October) during the war in 1971.

The tribunal accepted charges against nine on September 8 last year and cleared the other three. The court on December 23 framed five charges against the nine and the prosecution produced 17 witnesses, including two investigation officers. The defence declined to produce any witness.

Shakhawat was a central committee member of Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat, and a commander of Razakar force at Chingra Bazar camp. The

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Stranded for 7 months

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Afghanistan with him, we accepted it and paid him Tk 1 lakh to 1.5 lakh each for managing visas," one of the workers Ratan Mia told The Daily Star.

The factory in Herat city of Afghanistan produces steel billet for exporting to Middle Eastern countries. It has around 100 employees, mostly from Afghanistan.

"We got salaries for two months before the closure of the factory. Since then we are not getting any money," said Ratan of Kurigram.

Factory owner Abdullah Rasuli had agreed to pay each worker \$600 a month, but he gave only \$400, he alleged.

"Now we have no work here. We are facing serious problems in managing food and proper treatment. We can't even go out. We are staying here like captives," added the worker.

In April, family members of some of the victim workers filed a written complaint with the Afghanistan embassy in Dhaka against the owner of the factory. They requested the embassy to arrange safe return of their relatives.

Some embassy officials at that time had assured the relatives of looking into the matter, but they did little about it, said Zahid Alam Zia, son of another stranded worker Shah Alam Hawlader.

Ratan said an Afghan foreign ministry team visited the workers at the factory on June 8 and assured them of taking steps in this regard.

According to Zahid, a visiting Afghan government official had a meeting with embassy officials in Dhaka and the relatives of some workers. But the meeting did not yield any result.

"We are very frustrated as four months have passed since filing of the

written complaint and there no visible progress," he said.

Zia has recently given up his graduate studies as he had to take a job to support his four-member family.

His father Shah Alam from Barguna was an electrician at a still mill in Sonargaon of Narayanganj. He earned Tk 20,000 a month along with an additional Tk 15,000 as overtime allowance.

"My father had decided to go to Afghanistan to earn more. Now his life is in danger," lamented Zia.

Faridur Rahman Biswas of Manikganj went to Afghanistan to change his fortunes, but now he only wants to save his life, said his family members.

An Afghan embassy official in Dhaka said the authorities concerned were trying to address the problems of the Bangladeshis workers and arrange their safe return home.

"We've been in touch with the

victims' families since we came to know about the incident. We've informed our headquarters [foreign ministry] in Afghanistan, the governor and the police commissioner of the particular province about the Bangladeshis workers," he added.

Victims' relatives also informed the expatriates welfare ministry of Bangladesh about the issue and sought help in this regard.

"In a meeting on Tuesday, we discussed ways of helping the Bangladeshis workers," said Javed Ahmed, additional secretary of the ministry.

Usually the Bangladesh government does not encourage export of manpower to Afghanistan, he mentioned.

Monwar Hossain, director general of South Asia wing at the foreign ministry, said his office was not aware of the incident. He said the ministry would look into the matter.



Bangladeshi migrant workers sitting at a factory in Herat city of Afghanistan. They have been stranded there for over seven months. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangladesh has shut down insurgent camps

Indian state minister for home tells Lok Sabha

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India yesterday said Bangladesh has shut down most of the terror camps in their soil and it has always been the effort of both countries to close down such camps.

Stating that incidents of insurgency have come down over the years, India's State Minister for Home Affairs Hansraj Gangaram Ahir yesterday told the Lok Sabha, "We are working with neighbouring countries, Bangladesh and Myanmar, and are helping each other to deal with insurgency."

Replying to a query, he said there is no information so far that insurgent

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Keep tuition fee rise within 30pc

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ministry circular published yesterday.

The fees can be hiked only by the institutions which are having a financial crunch, it said.

The circular, applicable to non-government schools, colleges, madrasas and vocational institutions, came months after an outcry from guardians over a sudden increase in students' monthly tuition fees by a number of renowned private schools in Dhaka.

After the government announced the new pay scale for civil servants in December last year, these schools, without any prior notice, hiked the tuition fees by 50 to 100 percent this January, showing the salary hike as an "excuse".

Protesting the schools' move, many guardians even took to the streets. They demanded an immediate solution to the problem.

In February, the education ministry asked the school authorities to stop collecting the increased fees and refund the extra money. It also asked

the schools to come up with specific reasons for hiking the fees.

The ministry also sat with the educational institutions several times over the issue.

"Institutions getting MPO facilities fully and partially and those which are not enjoying the facilities at all have abnormally been increasing the tuition fees in the context of implementing the new pay scale for civil servants, and it is totally unacceptable," said the ministry circular.

In no way, an institution can raise fees beyond 30 percent of the current fees, it said.

The institutions also cannot charge session and development fees more than what are described in the admission regulations.

Meanwhile, talking to The Daily Star, some guardians said the government circular was not "clear" and had scopes for misinterpretation.

"The circular did not make it clear when and how many times schools can

increase the fees. Will they hike the fees every year?" said Gias Ahmed, a man from Kakrail who has a school-going daughter.

"If this is to be the case, it will be an extra burden on us," he said.

Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhivhabok Oikya Forum, a platform of guardians, said the government circular did not specifically say which schools could raise the tuition fees.

"The governing bodies of many schools had increased the fees and did not pay heed to the government's call to stop collecting the extra fees. Now these institutions will increase 30 percent of the already-increased fees," he explained.

The ministry should set the tuition fees before making such proposals, he suggested.

According to the circular, the institutions wanting to have the fees increased will have to send the proposal to the district education officer after it is recommended by the head of

institution's management committee.

"The district education officer will analyse the proposal and present it before the additional deputy commissioner [education] if the officer finds the reasons [for the hike] justified. Once the additional deputy commissioner approves it, the institutions would increase the fees," it said.

It also said the number of teachers and staff at private institutions must follow manpower guidelines and the institutions cannot introduce new branches without approval from the education ministry.

"Appointment of teachers and staff will not be legal if the branches are unapproved. Fees cannot be collected from students for paying salaries of teachers and staff appointed without approval," said the circular.

The circular also said the salary and allowances of a non-MPO-listed teacher would not be higher than that of an MPO-enlisted teacher of the same scale.

DAULATDIA FERRY TERMINAL Strong current hampering repair work

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia route have become uncertain as the damaged landing stations of Daulatdia ferry terminal in Rajbari cannot be repaired properly due to strong current in the Padma river.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) on Monday jointly started repairing the landing stations 2 and 4. After daylong efforts, the BIWTA completed the ramp-basement work, but the river eroded 40 feet of the approach road of the landing station 2 and affected its ramp-basement again yesterday.

Nizam Uddin Pathan, executive engineer of BIWTA, said they completed the ram-basement work of the damaged landing station 4. It is ready for use but its approach road is not ready, he added.

Golam Mostafa, executive engineer of RHD at Rajbari, said they might not be able to complete repairing the damaged approach roads before Thursday. He also admitted that his department is struggling to repair the approach road of the landing station 4.

About 40 percent work of its 150-foot-long approach road is complete, he added.

The ferry service on this route has been suspended since Sunday as three out of the four landing stations at Daulatdia terminal remained out of service.

The BIWTA expects to resume the full ferry service at the terminal by Thursday after repairing the landing stations by Wednesday.

In the meantime, the terminal authorities have been directing incoming vehicles to take a detour through either the Bangabandhu Bridge or Mawa ferry terminal.

During a visit to the Daulatdia ferry terminal yesterday, it was found around 40-foot-long approach road of the landing station 2 was damaged by strong current. A part of the abandoned landing station 1 was also washed away in the river.

Around 450 trucks were waiting at the Daulatdia ferry terminal for the ferry services to resume.

Workers of Rajbari RHD were seen

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'Robber' killed in 'gunfight' in Laxmipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

An alleged ringleader of a robber gang was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Laxmipur's Raipur upazila early yesterday.

The deceased is Alamgir Hossain of Dakshin Raipur.

On information that a gang of robbers was taking preparation for committing a robbery in Dakshin Raipur area, a team of police conducted a raid there around 2:00am, said Lokman Hossain, officer-in-charge of Raipur Police Station.

Sensing the presence of police, the gang members opened fire on the law enforcers, prompting them to retaliate, triggering a "gunfight", the official said.

Alamgir was caught in the line of

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