

Two Bangladeshi peacekeepers die in CAR road crash

UNB, Dhaka

At least two Bangladeshis, who are part of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR), were killed and two others were injured in a road crash on Saturday evening.

The dead were identified as soldier Arjan Hawlader, 34, of E-Bengal in Faridpur and Mohammad Ripul Mia, 35, of Division Locating Battalion Artillery in Rangpur. The injured were soldier Md Jamal Uddin Molla, 34, of E-Bengal in Faridpur and soldier Md Majahidul Islam, 36, of AD Regiment Artillery in Naogaon.

All of them were members of the Bangladesh Battalion-4 (Banabat-4), engaged in UN peacekeeping missions.

The accident took place as a heavy timber carrying conveyor lost control on the way at Yaloke area, leaving the two dead and two injured on the spot.

The injured were taken to capital city Bangui for treatment. Other peacekeepers stationed in CAR are safe.

Bangladesh Battalion has been engaged in the UN peacekeeping programme since October 2014.

Five-year-old falls to her death in well

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

A five-year-old girl died after she fell into a ring well in Bandarban's Ruma upazila Saturday evening.

Lily Marma was playing with other children near her house at Lung Jiri Para area around 6:00pm when she accidentally fell into an open ring well, her bereaved mother Nu Ching said, citing one of the children.

Later locals recovered her and rushed her to Ruma Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared her dead.

Local residents said the cover slab of the opening of the well has been missing for a long time.

"No case has been filed, as the contractor is ready to pay out a compensation of Taka 1,15,000 to the victim's family," said Shariful Islam Officer-in-Charge of Ruma Police Station.

Ruma upazila nirbahi officer Md Shamsul Alom however said that the

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Clockwise, from left... Police pick up "suspects" during an anti-narcotics raid at the city's Karwan Bazar. Officers forcibly drag another "suspect" on the rail lines. Police officers peeking inside shanties looking for drug peddlers and abusers. The "surprise" raid started an hour after a contingent of a thousand police officers had gathered at the spot, possibly tipping off drug peddlers in the areas. Locals also alleged that sources had informed the drug peddlers about the drive beforehand.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A farce of a raid

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how they should go about their job. Meantime, some policemen were gossiping, some sipping tea at nearby tea stalls and some were seen buying litchis.

Detectives, dog squads and even a water cannon were also on the scene.

"How can you conduct a drive against narcotics after such public announcement?" a constable was heard asking his colleague, mockingly.

Around 2:30pm, the additional deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division and the officers-in-charge of Tejgaon and Tejgaon Industrial police stations arrived at the scene.

About 15 minutes later, the deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division reached the spot and instructed the policemen to detain the people whom the cops would suspect as drug abusers.

This is how a "secret" anti-drug operation started at Karwan Bazar railway slum, raising questions about the objective of such drives.

The drive finally began at 3:00pm, with detectives and policemen going from hut to hut and taking away anyone they thought was a suspect.

Some were sleeping; some were sitting in front of the shanties while some were

loitering on the railway track.

Most of them were day labourers (porter) and street vendors who worked all night and were sleeping at the time of the raid, slum dwellers claimed.

Some of them were small drug peddlers and drug users.

According to locals, drug trade in Karwan Bazar slum remains suspended for about six months. Only a handful of the peddlers are active now with the help of police sources.

On Saturday night, the police sources tipped those peddlers off about the raid and asked them to leave the area, a number of slum dwellers alleged.

During the raid, detectives and policemen were calling some suspects by names as if they knew each other.

Within half an hour, they picked up 47 people, including four women.

Nure Haowa, 40, was crying near a police van. She alleged three of her relatives were picked up.

Among them, Sharif and Raju are potato vendors who worked all night and were sleeping in the room when the cops came, she said.

When some policemen saw this correspondent taking photos and footage of the raid, they approached him and

asked him to stop filming.

"Put the phone down, put the phone down. You cannot film the raid. You have to take permission," said a cop named Rafique threateningly.

Briefing reporters at the spot around 3:45pm, DB Joint Commissioner Abdul Baten claimed their "special team" was working to arrest the listed drug dealers.

"And here [drug spot] we are conducting the raid to arrest people who would be found with drugs and who are still out of the drug traders list," he said.

Asked about the link of some cops with drug dealers, Baten said there were bad people in every profession. "We will take action if allegations are found against any policemen."

Such preparations, announcements and arrangements before raids have raised questions if law enforcers would really be able to catch any top drug dealers and their patrons.

One of such raids was conducted in Korail slum of Mohakhali on Saturday night. Around 1,000 policemen with a dog squad gathered on T&T ground just beside the slum around 7:30pm. They set up a tent, four bright lights, and two horn speakers which they used to warn slum dwellers that they would be conduct-

ing a raid there.

Meanwhile, in another drive at Ganaktuli area of Hazaribagh yesterday, over 100 people, including five women, were detained on suspicion of drug abuse.

After interrogation, 50 people were arrested in different cases, said Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of DMP.

The drive at Sweeper Colony started at 11:00am and continued for three hours, Abdullahil Kafi, additional deputy commissioner (Ramma Division) of DMP said, adding that around 700 policemen took part in the drive.

Around 1,500 litres of locally made alcohol, 300 pieces of yaba, some cannabis and phensedyl were seized from the area, the police official said.

A factory that made local alcohol was also sealed off.

Several people there said many of the detainees were innocent school and college students.

Kabir Hossain, 26, was picked up from his room while he was taking rest. Kabir is a labourer who works in Malaysia and came home on vacation for Eid.

Like him, tenth grader Jewel Das, 17, was picked up from his house.

"I requested the policemen not to take him away. My son is neither a drug abuser nor a peddler. I told them [police] you didn't get anything. Why are you taking him? They whisked him away forcefully," Jewel's mother Chaina Rani told The Daily Star.

Several hundred family members of the detainees gathered in front of the Institute of Leather Engineering and Technology and criticised the mass detention without verification.

The nationwide anti-drug drive was launched by Rab on May 4 on the prime minister's instructions. Police have been carrying out their own drive since May 18.

At least five raids were conducted in major drug spots in the capital and over 300 people were arrested in the last two days. They produced similar results -- big-time dealers escaping arrest and a handful of low profile dealers being detained.

Till Saturday, more than 7,000 alleged drug traders have been held and sued in around 5,500 cases across the country. Another 3,100 people were sentenced to various jail terms by mobile courts, according to police and Rab data.

RMP lists

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mentioned as drug traders, who directly invest, sell, and transport drugs, while 1,447 others have been named as addicts.

Most of the drug dealers in the list had been arrested in different police raids before. The dealers again got involved in the illegal trade after getting bail, police said.

There are around 100 spots in the city where drugs are sold. Guripara, Budhpara, Dasmari, Daspukur, Tultulipara and Mizaner Mor are among the major spots.

"Police continue the anti-narcotics drive. When they can arrest someone with drugs, they file cases against them," said RMP acting commissioner Suzayet Islam.

Police investigations in narcotics cases have not been eased as high police officials monitor the probes, he said, adding that most of the drug dealers reengaged with the trade when they were freed on bail.

The list mentions that most of the drug dealers have been involved in the trade for six months to three years. Some of them have been at it for over three years while a few others for more than 15 years.

There is a drug dealer in Dasmari area under Motihar Police Station who has been doing the illegal trade for 18 years. His investment in the trade is Tk 20 lakh, according to the list.

There is a red mark against the names of 264 drug traders who are involved in the trade for more than one year.

The RMP has now divided into 12 police stations, but the list was prepared on the basis of its four previous police stations.

Boalia Police Station that covers the main city has 516 drug dealers, which is the highest number in the list police station-wise. It has 513 addicts listed.

Rajpara Police Station in the western part of the city has 104 dealers and 724 addicts listed.

Motihar Police Station in the east of the city has 82 drug dealers and 59 addicts.

According to the list, there are 10 dealers and 14 addicts in Shah Makhdum Police Station in the city's north.

Apart from the police stations, the Detective Branch of RMP has listed 287 dealers and 137 addicts.

Police say with the fresh list, they are conducting the anti-narcotics drives.

Poura councillor killed in Teknaf

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the claim, and said he was never involved in yaba or narcotics trade.

Apart from him, 10 more alleged drug dealers were killed in so-called shootouts with Rab and police yesterday, raising the number of such killings to 84 in the ongoing anti-narcotics drive over the last 13 days.

Talking to this newspaper, Maj Ruhul Amin, Rapid Action Battalion-7 Company Commander in Cox's Bazar, said, "Ekramul was at the top of the list prepared by the Department of Narcotics Control [DNC] and the home ministry. He is known as a yaba godfather in the criminal underworld.

"According to our information, Ekramul stood accused in two cases, including one for narcotics filed with Teknaf Police Station. There may be more cases against him."

Asked, Ranjit Kumar Barua, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, told The Daily Star, "There were two cases with this station against Ekramul. One was filed over his alleged involvement in a clash and the other was a liquor case lodged under the narcotics act."

The first case, filed in 2008, was disposed of by court, and police already gave the final report in the liquor case, the OC added.

Final report means clearing an accused of the charges in a case.

When his attention was drawn to the OC's comments, Maj Ruhul said, "We collected proper information about him [Ekramul]."

Replying to another query, the Rab official said, "There is no political motive behind this as he [Ekramul] was a top-listed drug dealer in Teknaf."

"Rab has been working with hundred percent transparency and accountability, and there can be no question about it," he insisted.

Contacted, Soman Mondol, assistant director of the DNC in Cox's Bazar, said, "As far as I know, the DNC did not file any case against Ekramul Haque."

Asked whether Ekramul was at the top of the DNC's list of drug dealers, the official said, "I cannot say anything without seeing the list properly as it was prepared by the DNC headquarters upon verification of information."

Contacted, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said he was unaware of the incident.

Asked whether they would probe the incident, he said every "shootout" incident is investigated by a magis-



The under construction ancestral home of Ekramul Haque, who was killed in a "gunfight" between Rab and drug peddlers in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf yesterday. The former president of Teknaf upazila Awami League and an incumbent ward councillor could not complete the construction of his home due to a lack of funds. However, Rab claimed that he was a top drug dealer contradicting the claims of around 200 locals.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



Ekramul

duce evidence to support its claim.

Jabed Iqbal Chowdhury, president of Teknaf municipality unit of the AL, said Ekramul had been an active and dedicated organiser of the party.

The AL leader further said that even Ekramul's rivals could not label him as a yaba dealer.

Nurul Alam, a local businessman, said, "Ekram was a friendly and benevolent person ... We never heard about his involvement in yaba trade."

Many locals also gave similar impression about Ekramul, who was elected councillor in three consecutive elections since the establishment of Teknaf municipality.

His brother Ehsanul, a trader, said Ekram had been going through financial hardship and had to take help from him and in-laws.

Ekramul used to live in his ancestral house with his wife and two daughters. He started construction of a building on his inherited land in 2009 but could not complete it for dearth of money.

Hundreds of people thronged Ekramul's house after his body was brought there following autopsy at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. Many of

them were in tears.

He was buried at his family graveyard after namaz-e-janaza at Teknaf Pilot High School ground last night.

Ehsanul said the janaza was supposed to be held at Jaliapara Eidgah. But the venue had to be changed as the turnout exceeded its capacity.

The 10 others killed in anti-narcotics drives yesterday are Sanjoy, 25, in Mymensingh's Bolashpur Morakhol; Hasan, 38, in Noakhali's Sonaimuri upazila; Selim Uddin, 37, in Chandpur's Matlab upazila; Mital Biswas, 45, in Bagerhat's Chitalmari upazila; Halim Mondol, 35, in Kushtia town; Kala Mollah, 40, in Khulna's Digholia upazila; Hafizul Islam, 45, in Meherpur's Gangi upazila; Raihan Uddin, 28, at Chittagong's Naradisa-Sandwip Ferry Ghat; and Rafiqul Islam, 51, in Thakurgaon's Ranishankoil upazila.

Police said they seized phensedyl, heroin, yaba pills, hemp, firearms, bullets, crude bombs and sharp weapons from the crime scenes.

Of the 10 suspected drug dealers, nine were killed early yesterday in strikingly similar "gunfight" incidents narrated by police.

Four policemen were injured in the "gunfight" in Chittagong and two others in Thakurgaon, according to police.

They said Hasan, Selim, Mitul, Halim, Raihan and Rafiqul were accused in multiple criminal cases while Hafizul was an absconding convict.

Nasir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Kushtia Model Police Station, said Halim got killed during a raid around 2:45am when drug dealers opened fire on police. Police retaliated and Halim's body was found on the spot after the "gunfight", he said. Halim's father Selim Mondol, however, said his son was arrested several days ago from their village. OC Nasir