

Five ‘robbers’ killed in ‘gunfights’

STAR REPORT

Five suspected robbers, including four members of a robbery gang in the Sundarbans, were killed in two separate “gunfights” with law enforcers in Khulna and Habiganj early yesterday.

In Khulna, the four members of a robbery gang named “Aminur Bahini” were killed in an alleged gunfight with Rab-6 during a raid in Koyra upazila’s Koyra Khal area.

The dead were identified as Aminur Rahman, 33, the gang’s leader, Rafiqul Islam, 24, its second-in-command, Monish Saha, 26, and Akhtarul Islam, 36, Rab said.

Tofazzal Hossain, Rab-6 special company commander, said they conducted the raid around 2:00am following information that the leader of “Aminur Bahini” was staying there.

“Sensing our presence, the robbers entered the jungles of the Sundarbans and took position with arms. Then, they opened fire on the Rab team, forcing us to retaliate,” said Tofazzal, also an assistant superintendent of police.

“The gunfight continued in several phases until today [yesterday] morning. Some members of the gang fled the scene when day broke, leaving behind the four injured,” he told our Khulna correspondent.

The four were rushed to Koyra Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared them dead, he added.

The bodies were sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Tofazzal also said that two Rab members were also injured during the “gunfight”. They were also admitted to the health complex.

Rab claimed to have recovered three

firearms from the scene.

However, Mithun Saha, brother of Monish Saha, told The Daily Star that some plainclothes policemen “picked up” his brother from their residence at Aichgati in Khulna’s Rupsha upazila on October 1.

“On October 10, we informed Rab-6 about it. We came to know about his death as ‘a robber of the Sundarbans’ today [yesterday]. But he was a small businessman,” said Mithun.

In Habiganj, suspected robber Kudrat Ali, 40, was killed in a “gunfight” with the detective branch (DB) of police around 3:00am, in Purasundha Bash Bagan area adjacent to the Dhaka-Sylhet highway, in the district’s Shayestaganj upazila.

Rabiul Islam, assistant superintendent of Habiganj police, said that Kudrat, a member of an inter-district robbery gang, was accused in 13 robbery cases filed with different police stations in Habiganj and Sylhet.

Acting on a tip-off about a robbery gang, of which Kudrat was a member, active in the area, a joint team comprising DB and police officials conducted a raid there.

Mozammel Haque, officer-in-charge of Shayestaganj police station, said that criminals opened fire on police after sensing their presence, which forced the law enforcers to retaliate.

“At one point, Kudrat Ali was shot,” he told our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The team claimed to have recovered one pipegun, two sharp weapons and five bullets from the spot.

The OC also said that six policemen were injured during the incident. They received treatment at Habiganj Adhunik Sadar Hospital, he added.

Jobs abroad on decline

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experts say could be much higher if the malpractices in recruitment is checked and migrant rights ensured overseas. Anomalies have also resulted in the restrictions in some markets like Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates.

The job market in the Middle East, the largest one for the Bangladeshis, is also shrinking because of their priorities on creating jobs for their own people in troubled economy.

“We need to clearly analyse these trends and devise strategies how to deal with the situation emerging,” said Prof Syeda Rozana Rashid of international relations department at Dhaka University.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia, the third largest job market for Bangladesh, suspended recruiting Bangladeshis in September last year on allegations that a syndicate of ten recruiting agencies was monopolising the recruitment business and charging recruiting fees as high as Tk 4,00,000 per worker in 2016-18.

The Mahathir-led government has initiated reforms in foreign worker recruitment sector, but is yet to resume recruitment from Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, Nepal, which had stopped sending its workers to Malaysia on allegations that Malaysian companies were involved in anomalies in recruiting workers, recently signed a deal with the Southeast Asia.

“Nepal has successfully negotiated and struck a deal with Malaysia, but we haven’t,” said Prof Rozana, also a migration analyst.

THE UAE

The UAE, the second largest job market for Bangladesh after Saudi Arabia, had imposed restriction for Bangladeshi workers in late 2012.

There was no formal explanation, but officials and businesses said involvement of some Bangladeshis in crimes, and corruption in recruitment led to the restrictions.

Between 2007 and 2012, 16.05 lakh Bangladeshis went to the UAE. Recruiting agents and officials said there were a lot of anomalies in recruitment during that time.

Many of the Bangladeshis did not have jobs in Dubai -- a situation that led to conflicts between brokers and workers and prompted the UAE authorities to close the door.

Presently only individuals of the UAE can hire Bangladeshis in domestic sector -- for jobs of driver, gardener, cook, etc.

Bangladesh and the UAE signed an MoU in April last year and the Gulf country was supposed to recruit Bangladeshis for general workers’ jobs, but it is yet to open it.

“I think it is under process. I am not sure exactly why it’s not beginning,” an official of the UAE embassy in Dhaka told The Daily Star on September 22.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia, which reopened its labour market for Bangladesh in 2015 after seven years of closure, recruited 12.44 lakh Bangladeshis between 2015 and August this year.

However, the country is now strongly enforcing Saudization policy, which means it is preferring recruitment of locals, not foreigners.

Since 2017, some 1.9 million foreigners left Saudi Arabia because of high tax regime on the foreigners and foreign businesses, according to the Saudi media.

Thousands of Bangladeshis are also returning home from Saudi Arabia, some with valid work permits.

An official of Bangladesh consulate

in Jeddah said many of the Bangladeshis who came to the Kingdom changed jobs or worked independently in violation of local law.

“However, the Saudi authorities are not allowing such violation of laws anymore. So, some of those who have valid work permits are also being detained and deported,” he told The Daily Star.

According to BMET, 234,071 Bangladeshis went to Saudi Arabia until August this year.

Hanif Mia, a Bangladeshi expatriate living in Riyadh for more than a decade, said many of these workers are actually not getting jobs in the companies that are hiring them. So, they are trying to work independently or in other companies in violation of the law.

“That’s the reason why they are being detained and deported,” he told The Daily Star by phone from Riyadh.

Saudi authorities are also enforcing laws banning operation of certain businesses, including that of mobile phone and electronics, by the foreigners. Many Bangladeshis, who were involved in such businesses are also returning home, he said.

OTHER COUNTRIES

Lebanon, which on an average recruited 16,000 Bangladeshis a year during 2013 and 2016, now recruits around 7,000 workers a year.

Similar is also the case with Bahrain, which has almost stopped recruiting from Bangladesh. Until August this year, Bahrain recruited only 132 workers, which was 811 last year, whereas it used to hire on an average 32,000 a year.

Jordan used to recruit on an average 20,000 workers from Bangladesh every year between 2013 and 2017. It came down to around 11,000.

The situation in Oman, Qatar, Singapore remains more or less the same, as they recruited 40,000 to 70,000 workers in recent years.

WHAT TO DO?

The new hope is Japan that has signed an MoU with Bangladesh on recruiting skilled workers.

Language training has begun recently for those who wish to go to Japan. It will take some time to prepare the candidates, BMET officials said.

Migration researcher Syeda Rozana Rashid said major problems that Bangladesh faces are failure in checking high migration cost that gives birth to other labour problems; lack of effective negotiation with the recruiting countries and improving required skills of those migrating.

Nursing, medical technology and caregiving are some of the skills that are required in the developed countries. There isn’t any effective measure in place to prepare the candidates and explore the markets, she said.

Businesses said in many of the cases, workers having skills in one sector are hired for other jobs. Thus, skills are not utilised properly.

Abdul Alam, proprietor of recruiting agency SA Trading, said international accreditation of the skills is very important for those willing to work in developed countries.

“I have tried to say this to the government in different times over the years, but nobody cares.”

Dependency only on the traditional labour markets requiring low and semi-skilled workers will not be helpful in the future, he added.

“If we can make our youths skilled in the professions demanded outside, we can gain much more. It’s high time we plan accordingly and start acting.”



Suspended Jubo League leader Samrat being taken to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate’s court in Dhaka yesterday. Inset, supporters of Samrat chant slogans as police take him away from the court in a microbus.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Samrat placed on 10-day remand

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lawyers said.

They also said Samrat was suffering from different ailments, including heart disease.

The former Jubo League leader was produced before the court around 1:00pm.

Meanwhile, walls of the chief metropolitan magistrate’s court and its surrounding area were found plastered with posters demanding Samrat’s release.

Activists of Jubo League and Samrat’s supporters also gathered around the court premises and chanted slogans claiming their leader’s innocence.

They demonstrated under the banner of “Ismail Hossain Samrat Mukti Parishad” until 1:40pm.

On October 6, Rab members arrested Samrat, former president of Dhaka South Jubo League, and his close aide Enamul Haque Arman, former vice-president of the same unit, in Cumilla after raiding a house near Indian border.

He came under the spotlight after Rab busted his illegal casino business at different sporting clubs in Dhaka. He was expelled from the Jubo League following his arrest.

Samrat was then brought to the capital, and the elite force conducted operations at various establishments where the Jubo League leader either lived or carried out political and business activities.

Rab also took Samrat to his political office in Kakrail where he had been reportedly staying since the crackdown

began on September 18.

Rab members at a press briefing said they had seized two torture devices, a pistol with five bullets, two hides of Kangaroo, 1,160 pieces of Yaba and 19 bottles of foreign liquor from there.

A Rab mobile court, led by Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam, sentenced Samrat to six months’ imprisonment for possessing wild animal hides and another six months for possessing illegal liquor.

Rab filed the two cases against him with Ramna police station the next day.

On September 24, the government imposed a travel ban on Samrat. Earlier on October 13, Samrat’s mother Sayera Khatun Chowdhury said her son was implicated in the cases due to personal and political vengeance.

Where is my failure?

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exclusive interview with The Daily Star at his office on Sunday night.

Abrar Fahad, a second-year student of Buet’s electrical and electronic engineering department, was beaten to death by some Chhatra League men at the university’s Sher-e-Bangla Hall sometime between 8:30pm on October 6 and 1:30am on October 7.

The murder touched off widespread outrage across the country. Fumed, students of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology began a demonstration on the campus, demanding the highest punishment for the killers. They also called for the VC’s resignation over his “silence”.

Buet Alumni Association and Buet Teachers’ Association also demanded the VC step down for his “failure to ensure security” on the campus.

After the grisly murder, Prof Saiful neither met the agitating students, nor did he attend the namaz-e-janaza of Abrar. He showed up around 38 hours after the killing to hold a meeting with the provosts of the university dormitories, the students alleged.

During the two-and-a-half-hour interview, Prof Saiful, who was appointed the VC on June 23, 2016, defended his position and the actions he took after learning about Abrar’s death around 3:00am on October 7.

He said on top of overseeing administrative work, he monitored the situation and maintained constant communication with the police and the higher authorities. He also formed an inquiry committee in consultation with senior teachers that very day.

“I was in my office, doing everything possible to maintain the situation,” said Prof Saiful, an eminent educationist, researcher and electrical and electronic engineering expert.

Asked why he did not meet the agitating students soon after the murder, the Cambridge-educated engineer said, “It was an abnormal situation. The students were furious. Had I gone there, I would have been held hostage because of some miscommunications.”

“Then I would have not been able to maintain communication with the government and that communication was very crucial at that time,” said the academician, who has more than 44 years of experience in teaching and running university administration.

He said the director of the university’s Directorate of Students’ Welfare (DSW) is supposed to handle the situation if anything bad happens to students.

“It is the director’s prime duty. He maintains communications with the vice chancellor and takes necessary support from the university authorities. He is supposed to constantly remain in touch with the VC until the matter is resolved.”

Narrating the events that unfolded after Abrar murder, Prof Saiful said he got a call from the director around 3:00am on October 7. The VC then woke up his personal secretary and programme officer and requested them to rush to the scene.

From then onward, Prof Saiful said, he was continuously in touch with the officials. He also ordered to call police to the campus and lodge a general diary

over the incident.

The VC said the matter was then handled by the higher authorities of police, including the inspector general of police, and the prime minister.

He said he made arrangement for making copies of the CCTV footage from the Sher-e-Bangla Hall and it took almost the entire day.

Replying to a query, he said he called an emergency meeting at his office around 11:00am on October 7.

The meeting, which was attended by faculty deans, department heads, institution directors and other senior teachers of the university, decided to form an inquiry committee, which started working right away.

Prof Saiful said the deputy education minister was also informed about the situation. Since the university was closed due to Durga Puja holidays, he had to do most of the tasks himself, he said.

Around 3:30pm, Abrar’s uncle along with one of his relatives met the VC, who consoled the two and gave them an ambulance to take Abrar’s body to his home in Kushtia for burial. They were also given a university bus, he said.

Asked why he did not attend the namaz-e-janaza on the campus, he said no one had informed him about it.

“No one even told me that Abrar’s father came to the campus. I would have certainly visited him and attended the prayers if I had been informed,” he said.

Talking about student ragging which took a nasty turn at the university dormitories, Prof Saiful blamed the DSW for the situation.

“This [ragging] has a long history. It dates back even before my joining [as Buet VC],” he said.

He said DSW Director Prof Delwar Hossain tried his best to keep things under control, but he left due to “health reasons” citing huge work pressure.

Later, Prof Satya Prasad Majumder was given the charge, but he also could not stop ragging at the halls. Prof Saiful said Prof Satya failed to check the practice “probably because he was too soft”.

The VC said he learnt about student torture in the name of ragging in June this year during a session review committee meeting with the deans, department heads and institution directors. Some guardians also lodged complaints about ragging, he said.

“The then DSW director Prof Satya Prasad Majumder was not present at the meeting and I immediately ask him about it over phone. I asked him politely, but he loudly replied that there was no proof to this end. I felt really bad,” he said.

During another meeting, Prof Satya Prasad told the VC that he could no longer hold the position.

Later, Prof Saiful appointed Prof Abul Kashem Miah as the new DSW director. Prof Abul, however, had to resign from the post right away due to strong opposition from BCL leaders, he said.

Later, Prof Mizanur Rahman replaced Prof Abul. Initially, he took some good steps and even handed down punishment to some students.

“But a few weeks later, I found that

Prof Mizan was also unable to control the [behaviour of BCL] leaders,” the VC said, adding, “I cannot intervene here directly. It’s the DSW which is authorised to look after the students.”

Replying to another query, he rejected the allegation that the DSW director did not get cooperation from him.

“It is absolutely false. If he does not get me all the time, how could he reach me over phone at 3:00 in the morning the day Abrar was killed?” he asked.

“My door is always open for him,” he said, adding that the DSW director would get all assistance in future.

Prof Saiful said a senior teacher with a strong personality should be holding the DSW director’s post so that students, provosts and assistant provosts obey his orders.

“That has been our practice,” he said.

Asked about his high number of overseas trips, he said he went abroad for the interests of the university. He said he presented his own research paper on two occasions. “I never took a single penny from the university or the government.”

“I was invited and those who invited me bore all the expenses,” said Prof Saiful, who has many publications in peer-reviewed journals.

He said he signed 66 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with different universities, institutions and organisations, including Oxford University, for research collaboration, faculty members exchange and post graduate student exchange during his tenure as the Buet VC. “These facility members have started bringing positive results for us.”

Speaking about the allegation that it was difficult to reach him, the VC said it was also not true. “My door is always open for the students and the teachers. I am always available for them.”

He said, “After nine years, I arranged a convocation attended by nearly 7,500 Buet students in February. It would have not happened had there been any gap.”

He said he sought government permission for holding another convocation in February next year.

Asked why he lives outside the university campus, Prof Saiful said he does that because he received various threats. “It’s unfortunate that I got life threats through anonymous letters and text messages. It has been painful for since I joined office.”

“I stay on the campus from morning to midnight. I also need to attend various meetings which are compulsory for me,” he said.

The VC also refuted the allegation of delaying in dispatching official files. “When I took charge, there was a backlog of around 4,500 files. It is because my post had been vacant for a couple of months and the immediate past VC was ill for quite some time. It took me around a year and a half to clear those files. That’s why there were some delays in file processing. It was quite painful.”

“Another point is that I do not sign any file blindly without going through the contents. Currently there is no file pending with me,” he added.

Woman with psychological issues kills son

STAR REPORT

A mother allegedly killed her son in Narayanganj throwing him off the roof her home Monday evening.

Locals and police said she had psychological issues and had thrown her two-and-a-half-years-old son off the roof of her home in Narayanganj’s Fatullah around 7:00pm Monday.

He family members took the boy to Dhaka Medical College Hospital but he did not survive the four-storey fall. He died around 10:00pm.

Police detained the mother.

Buet protest

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our demands,” he added.

Sayem also said they would organise a mass oath-taking ceremony today to resist terrorism and communal forces on the campus.

Buet teachers and students will take part and the field-level protest will be called off through the oath-taking, he said.

“The general students will not take part in any academic activities until the Buet authorities expel the accused on the basis of the charge sheet submitted by the law enforcers,” he added.

“We do not want to share the same academic culture with the killers,” he added.

ONE MORE CONFESSED TO KILLING

Buet student Moniruzzaman Monir, an accused in the Abrar Fahad murder case, yesterday confessed before a magistrate that he and several others hit Abrar with cricket stumps.

In his statement, Moniruzzaman said he and some others took Abrar to Room No 2011 of the Sher-e-Bangla Hall where he struck Abrar four to five times with a cricket stump, investigators and court sources said.

He also said several others, including Anik Sarkar, the information and research secretary of Buet BCL, hit Abrar the most, which led to his death.

After recording Moniruzzaman’s statement, Metropolitan Magistrate Sarafuzzaman Ansary sent him to jail.

Earlier, five leaders of Buet BCL made confessional statements admitting their involvement in Abrar’s murder.

In another development, detectives arrested ASM Nazmus Sadat, an accused in the murder case, in Dinajpur early yesterday, while he was trying to flee to India.

With Nazmus’s arrest, so far 20 people have been arrested in connection with the murder. He is a batch-17 student of Buet’s mechanical engineering department.

Meanwhile, the same court yesterday placed Shamsul Arefin Rafath, another accused, on a fresh four-day remand after he was produced before the court on completion of his five-day remand.

The court also ordered to send Akash Hossain, an accused, to jail after his five-day remand.

The grisly murder took place between 7:30pm on October 6 and 2:30am on October 7. The incident sparked protests on university campuses across the country.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, while talking to journalists at the secretariat yesterday, urged Buet students, who are protesting Abrar’s brutal murder, to go back to the class as the prime minister has assured Abrar’s parents that there would be quick action and disposal of the case.

Yesterday, the University Grants Commission requested the public universities to strengthen security measures for teachers, students, officers and employees ensuring round-the-clock monitoring of classrooms, halls and campuses.

‘ANIK WAS NOT ASSAULTED IN JAIL’ Anik Sarkar, one of the accused in the Abrar murder case who is currently in jail, was not assaulted by inmates or jail police, the BSS reported quoting a senior official.

“After his arrest, Anik Sarkar was sent to Dhaka Central Jail and kept in a prison cell following proper procedures,” said BSS quoting a statement issued by Inspector General of Prisons Brigadier General AKM Mustafa Kamal Pasha.

He said Anik was not physically assaulted inside the jail by inmates or jail police. The media reports earlier that said Anik was beaten in jail were false, the statement said.

Indonesia arrests two dozen after minister attack

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian police said they have arrested more than two dozen suspected militants after members of a network linked to the Islamic State (IS) group tried to assassinate a government minister.

The world’s biggest Muslim majority nation is on high alert ahead of President Joko Widodo’s second-term inauguration on Sunday, with some 27,000 troops expected to be deployed in the capital Jakarta.

Authorities have also banned mass demonstrations in the lead up to Widodo’s swearing in, for fear they might be used as cover for an attack, State Intelligence Agency spokesman Wawan Purwanto said.