

Man killed in 'gunfight' with police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A suspected criminal was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Noakhali early yesterday.

The dead Ratan Mia, 35, son of Rahamatullah of Mahatabpur in Sonaimuri upazila, was accused in 13 cases over murder, drug, and robbery with different police stations, said police.

Police arrested him in the area on Saturday evening, said Abdus Salam, officer-in-charge of Sonaimuri Police Station.

Following the information provided by him during primary interrogation, police took him to a drive to Podipara village to recover firearms and drugs around 3:00am, said the OC.

As soon as they had reached the spot, the "cohorts" of Ratan started firing on the team forcing them to retaliate, he said, adding that Ratan tried to flee during the "gunfight".

As his cohorts retreated, police found the bullet-hit body of Ratan lying on the ground.

He was taken to Noakhali General Hospital where doctors declared him dead on arrival, said police.

Police claimed to have recovered a local gun, four bullets, and 31 yaba pills from the spot.

BSF shoots

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when member of Phulbari BSF Camp opened fire on them, said Lt Col Samiunnabi Chowdhury, commanding officer of 50th BGB Battalion of Thakurgaon.

Rezabul sustained a bullet injury in his lower abdomen while his companions managed to flee the scene unhurt and bring the victim to their village, he added.

On information, BGB men rescued Rezabul and sent him to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital around 8:00am where he succumbed to his injuries around 11:30am, the BGB official said.

Meanwhile, BSF and BGB sat on a flag meeting upon invitation from the later. In the meeting, BGB strongly protested the killing at the border whereas BSF denied any incident of firing.

An unnatural death case was filed with Thakurgaon Police Station in connection with the incident. The body was handed over to the victim's family members after conducting autopsy.

On this day

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will commence shortly, says CS Kahlon, rehabilitation secretary of India.

They will be given rations for two weeks, he added. He also says that, 1,30,000 Bangladeshis has already returned on foot.

Sheikh Mujib was taken to Rawalpindi for discussion, Pakistan officials say.

"India will not keep its troops in Bangladesh for a single day, if not needed," Indian Foreign Minister Saran Singh tells his British counterpart Sir Alec Douglas Hug in London.

Pakistan president Bhutto fires six top Navy officers.

City polls

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press briefing.

The last date for submitting nomination papers is December 31 and the last date for withdrawal of candidacy is January 9. The EC will scrutinise nomination papers on January 2.

CEC KM Nurul Huda, in the press briefing, also requested the voters to turn up to the polling centres. "We will ensure security so that you can return home safely after casting your votes," he said.

Responding to a question, he said there was no scope of thinking that the EC works for any particular political party. "The elections will be competitive and open for all," he assured.

The CEC also said that the incumbent mayors of the city corporations would have to resign from their posts for taking part in the upcoming polls.

According to the EC, the two city corporations have over 54.02 lakh voters -- 30.35 lakh in DNCC and 23.67 lakh in DSCC -- to cast their votes in the elections.

Along with electing the mayors, DNCC voters will also elect 54 ward councillors and 18 reserved women councillors while DSCC voters will elect 75 ward councillors and 25 reserved women councillors.

Meanwhile, a statement of the ruling Awami League read that the party would sell nomination forms to aspirants for mayoral positions from December 25 to December 27. The forms will be available at the AL president's Dhanmondi office.

On the other hand, the BNP is likely to participate in the polls, said the party leaders.

The BNP standing committee would make a final decision on joining the Dhaka city polls, said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in November.

Macron says French forces 'neutralise' over 30 jihadists in Mali

AFP, Abidjan

in 2012 has engulfed the centre of the country and spread to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

Macron arrived as French and UN troop presence has come under fire from critics questioning the military role of the former colonial power in the region as jihadist attacks have been on the rise.

Macron said in a speech to the French community in Ivory Coast that 33 "terrorists" had been "neutralised", a term a source close to the presidency said meant they had been killed.

French soldiers also released two Malian gendarmes being held by jihadists, he said.

"This considerable success shows the commitment of our forces, the support that we bring to Mali, to the region and to our own security," Macron said.

"We have had losses, we also have victories this morning thanks to the commitment of our soldiers and Operation Barkhane," he said, referring to the France's military operation against Islamist militants in the Sahel.

Last month's crash was the biggest single-day loss for the French military in nearly four decades and raised fresh questions about the effectiveness of France's operation.

Macron arrived in Ivory Coast

on Friday to celebrate Christmas with French troops but the jihadist insurgency in the region was the top item on Macron's agenda during his 48-hour stay.

The leaders of the anti-jihadist G5 Sahel military alliance are due to attend a summit in France on January 13, when Macron said they would clarify the "political and strategic framework" of the operation after tensions emerged.

"I cannot ask our soldiers to take risks to fight against terrorism and the security of these countries and on the other hand to have public opinions of these same countries believing in untruths," Macron said.

6,000 to lose means for survival

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MARGINALISING THE MARGINALISED

The 512 acres of land of Chandpur tea estate at Chunarughat upazila in Habiganj is one of the 88 places where the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (Beza) plans to build SEZs.

According to its website, Beza, formed in 2010, "aims to establish economic zones in all potential areas in Bangladesh including backward and underdeveloped regions with a view to encouraging rapid economic development through increase and diversification of industry, employment, production and export."

In 2015, the government cancelled Duncan Brother's lease on the land in question and Beza acquired the 512 acres, where workers of Chandpur tea estate have been farming since the establishment of the tea garden in 1890.

When the tea labourers came to know about the government's decision, they started protesting it. For months, they guarded their rice farms and held demonstration and rallies, but the government remained firm in its decision.

"Recently, a number of people in expensive cars visited the land and asked about the cost of land filling in the area," said Nipen Paul, joint-secretary of Bangladesh Tea Labourer's Union Central Committee.

"Besides, a local lawmaker at a programme in Sylhet recently announced that the work of setting up the SEZ in Chunarughat will start soon," he said.

Fearing imminent eviction, the Chandpur tea estate workers started a one-hour daily strike from December 7, protesting the establishment of SEZ in their cropland.

The owners, in turn, deduct a certain percentage of the workers' daily ration for the use of each decimal of land. The deduction is almost like a payment of land tax, he claimed.

Both the accommodation and

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the cropland are passed down to the next generation along with the tea-labourer's job, he added.

The tea workers belong to various tribal groups, and were brought to the tea estates in Sylhet division as bonded labourers by the British around 200 years ago from different other parts of Indian subcontinent.

They are, however, not given any legal entitlement to the land.

Barrister Jotirmoy Barua, coordinator of Life and Nature Safeguard Platform (LNSP), pointed out that the rights of the tribal tea-workers over the land they use must be recognised because Bangladesh had ratified the International Labour Organisation Convention 107.

Article 11 of the convention asks governments to recognise the right of ownership of land traditionally occupied by underprivileged tribal groups.

Jotirmoy said Bangladesh did not enact any law in line with the convention.

AGRICULTURE VS INDUSTRY

Barrister Jotirmoy Barua also referred to a remark made by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the 10th council of the Krishak League at the Suhrawardy Udayan on November 6 this year, where she reiterated her stance on not allowing industries on arable land.

"BEZA is violating it in every step," he alleged.

President of the Begum Khan tea garden Panchyat Committee Chandra Karmakar complained that the district administration classified the 512 acres as "barren land" in the 2015 requisition document, although workers had been growing crops there for more than a century.

The tea estate is yet another where

workers stand to lose their land.

According to Upazila Agriculture officer of Chunarughat Jalal Uddin Sarkar, yearly production of paddy and other crops in the 512 acres of land are worth 80 lakh and 20 lakh taka.

Even Beza, in reply to an application filed by this correspondent under the Right to Information Act, mentioned that the land chosen for the SEZ in Chunarughat is unused cropland where a certain varieties of rice is grown, swamp and canal type.

Yet, Beza mentioned that the land was taken under Acquisition and Requisition of Immovable Property Ordinance 1982 and Non-agriculture Khas Land Management and Settlement Policy 1995.

Eminent Supreme Court lawyer Hasnat Quaiyum told this correspondent that he had visited the spot and found it to be paddy land. "The local government office termed it barren land and this is false. This is punishable under articles 167 and 409 of the penal code," he added.

Shamsul Huda, executive director of Association of Land Reform and Development (ALRD) and a member of Life and Nature Safeguard Platform (LNSP), said, "The government should work to establish the land rights of the tea-workers, otherwise a large number of indigenous populations may face food scarcity in the near future."

Chairman of Bangladesh Tea Association Shah Alam also opposed the idea of setting up the SEZ on tea estate land.

"When Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman was the chairman of the Tea Board, he announced that the land of tea estates would remain intact. He [Bangabandhu] made this remark keeping the workers' tradition and their poor condition in mind," he said.

Noting that agriculture sector is as important as the industry sector, Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, former caretaker government adviser and executive chairperson of Power and Participation Research Centre said, "There is a tendency to take the lands of marginalised people without

prioritising efficient use of land. It must be stopped."

ECONOMY OVER ENVIRONMENT? Meanwhile, activists and forest officials are concerned about the environmental impact of the proposed Chandpur tea estate SEZ on the Satchhara National forest and Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary and rivers of the area.

According to the forest department, Satchhara National Forest is only four kilometres away from the SEZ while Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary is 19 kilometres away.

General Secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolok (Bapa) Central Committee Sharif Jamil said, "Increased traffic to connect the economic zone through Satchhara will hamper the wildlife habitat and facilitate poaching. It will lead the forests to complete death. Death of this rainforest will severely impact the streams and rivers at the downstream".

"Rivers like Sonai, Bolobhadra will be affected by the ecological degradation. Especially, Sutang will be highly affected by this specific zone. These will pollute the Meghna river that has far widespread impacts," he warned.

He urged the government to conduct comprehensive and transparent assessment and review the plan of setting up a SEZ in Chunarughat.

Divisional Forest Officer of wildlife management and nature conservation in Sylhet ANM Abdul Wadud told this correspondent that different species of birds, reptiles and apes in the Satchhara National Forest will be endangered if the SEZ is established.

Even Raghunandan and Rema-Kalenga forests will be affected, he added.

The RTI application revealed that Beza has not done any feasibility study or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for establishing the special economic zone yet.

Beza, itself, would not comment on the matter and has only responded when an RTI application is filed.

Adieu, friend of the poor!

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the graveyard premises, following Zohr prayers.

Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus said, "It is unimaginable that an individual can play such a huge role in changing people's fortune. Seventeen crore countrymen somehow have been benefited from what he [Sir Fazle Abed] did for the country."

He added that Abed had spent his entire life for the wellbeing of the people.

In a condolence book kept at the venue, Yunus wrote, "Sir Fazle Hasan Abed is the part and parcel of the history of the country's mass people."

He delved deep into every issue, said Dr Yunus, adding that in doing so he had to form many organisations and he created a unique system for the management of those.

"I will ask our young generation to take lessons from his activities and apply those for the wellbeing of the people," he added.

Recalling Abed's contribution, National Professor Anisuzzaman, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, former CEC ATM Shamsul Huda, Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus, PM's advisors Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury and Salman F Rahman, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, former finance minister AMA Muhith, and Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam were all present to pay their tributes.

Members of Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, Bishwa Sahitya Kendra, Brac, Brac University, Ain O Salish Kendra, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Sajida Foundation, CAMPE, Pip Trust, Nijera Kori, Bengal Foundation, CCDB, CRP, World Vision Bangladesh, and Grameen Bank placed floral wreaths on Abed's coffin.

The poor people of Bangladesh have lost a true friend... said Akbar Ali Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government.

Despite leading a large organisation such as Brac, Abed believed in learning all the time, said Khan.

He worked throughout his life for the people starting from the country's independence in 1971 through founding different organisations, said Kamal, also president of Gono Forum.

"He was an extraordinary personality."

After Abed's body was taken to the Army Stadium, representatives on

unlimited for the betterment of rural people, Quader said.

"Bangladesh lost one of her best sons in Abed, who was creative and meritorious," he added.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said Sir Fazle Hasan Abed's departure is an irreparable loss for the country.

"We saw discipline in his everyday activities which is an extraordinary example. He was a creative and pro-people person. The vacuum created through his departure will not be filled," he added.

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda said Abed was an inspiration for finding the potential in marginalised people.

Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Julia Niblett said with the death of Sir Fazle Abed, Bangladesh has lost a giant in development.

"The contribution that he has made over several decades to reduce inequality, and serving the people of Bangladesh with quiet humility, is outstanding and enduring," she said.

US Ambassador in Bangladesh Earl R Miller said Abed contributed to eradicating poverty and to the progress of living standards of millions of people in Bangladesh and beyond.

UK government's Department for International Development Country Representative Judith Herbertson said Bangladesh, and indeed the world, has lost a true visionary.

Sir Fazle Abed changed the face of Bangladesh and his consistent focus on the poorest and most marginalised is beyond comparison, she said.

Unicef Bangladesh Representative Tomoo Hozumi said Sir Fazle Abed made revolutionary changes to the concept of NGO and its operation, including social enterprises not only in Bangladesh but also globally, and positively impacted the lives of millions of people.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said Sir Fazle Hasan Abed's life and works are spread across the globe.

AL lawmaker Fazle Noor Taposh said Abed was an inspirational personality.

"He is a pride of the nation," Taposh said.