

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 Hugn 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 Novmber.

Macron says French forces ‘neutralise’ over 30 jihadists in Mali

AFP, *Abidjan*

President Emmanuel Macron said French forces had “neutralised” several dozen jihadists in Mali on Saturday, as he visited West Africa with a pledge to give new force to the battle against Islamist militants in the region.

The operation involving teams of commandos and attack helicopters in the flashpoint city of Mopti in central Mali came just weeks after 13 French soldiers were killed in a helicopter crash as they hunted jihadists in the country’s north.

Despite a French troop presence and a 13,000-strong UN peacekeeping force in Mali, the conflict that erupted

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.

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 QUESTION OF LAND RIGHTS
Nipen explained the custom in all tea-gardens was that workers will live in and cultivate the fallow land within the gardens.

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



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 Udyan 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

“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.

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 Mujibur 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 Satchhari National forest and Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary and rivers of the area.

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

General Secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) Central Committee Sharif Jamil said, “Increased traffic to connect the economic zone through Satchhari 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 Satchhari National Forest will be endangered if the SEZ is established.

Even Raghunandan and Rema-Kalengaya 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.

Elephants trample another to death in Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bandarban*

A woman was trampled to death by wild elephants in Bandarban’s Naikhyangchhari upazila early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Saleha Begum, 55, of Dochhari area of the upazila, said police.

Anwar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Naikhyangchhari Police Station, said a herd of wild elephants went to the area from the nearby forest in search of food in early hours of the day.

Around 4:00am, the elephants broke into the thatched house of Saleha in the area and trampled her to death, said the OC.

A man was trampled to death by elephants in the same upazila on Friday.

Home belongs

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charges of facilitating the land grabbers.

ACC FINDINGS
According to the case statement, the house-221 in Nawabpur is a vested property. The Dhaka DC office in 1975 leased out the property to Masuda Khanam, mother of martyred intellectual and former deputy commissioner of Cumilla Shamsul Haq Khan.

The property was under the possession of Azharul Haque Khan, a member of the family, who had regularly been paying the lease money.

When the land was in Azharul’s possession, Javed made a fake deed of the land at Joydevpur Sub-registrar’s office.

Javed claimed that one Nani Gopal Bosak was the land owner, and after his death, his son Tapan Kumar Bosak became the owner in 1967.

Scrutinising the documents, the anti-graft body found the accused had manipulated the land records. “A discrepancy has been found in the writing and colour of ink used on pages 251 and 252 of the records,” reads the FIR.

Later, Javed had a case filed by Tapan for the return of the vested property with a court where they had submitted fake documents and a deed of the property.

“Analysing evidence, it is also known that Javed is the kingpin of a fraud syndicate that grabs the government land,” reads the FIR.

On September 28 last year, some people, led by Javed, grabbed the house, looted valuables and evicted the family.

A day after the incident when the victim’s family went to Bangshal Police Station to file a case, the officer-in-charge informed Ibrahim, the then DC (Wari division), of the incident and recorded a theft case.

Later, the DMP initiated an enquiry after receiving a written complaint from the victim’s family.

According to the probe report, some 30 to 35 armed criminals stormed the house, tied all the residents, and looted valuables worth Tk 5 crore.

Despite knowing that the land grabbers evicted the legal owner of the house, demolished a three-storey building and constructed a basement for a new building, Ibrahim did not take any legal action against the grabbers, showing utmost negligence in discharging his duty, the report added. Police sources said he helped the grabbers for a huge amount of bribe.

In its case statement, the ACC said if they found Tapan’s involvement in investigation, legal action would be taken against him.

Apart from Tapan, those who will be found involved in this incident would be made accused in the case, it added.

Forecast

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next cold wave.

Meanwhile, at least five people died in Moulvibazar’s Kamalganj upazila in the last two days allegedly due to health complications aggravated by the cold weather while several thousand others across the country sought medical attention for cold-related diseases.

The deceased are Rakkhal Chasha, 46, and Dangama Kurmi, 60, Buleshwari Turia, 45, and Hariya Bin, 60, and Anjub Ali.

Kamalganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ashekul Haque confirmed the death incidents to The Daily Star.

“All of them died from severe cold as they had a lack of warm clothing,” Sitaram Bin, UP member of Shamsheernagar union told our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The number of patients took treatment at the hospitals across the country yesterday dropped slightly to 4,254 from 4,556 a day before, according to the control room of the Directorate General of Health Services.

Of them, 720 were admitted for acute respiratory infection, 1,741 for diarrhoea, and 1,793 for other ailments, including fever, dysentery, and jaundice.