

Shahed faked his own Covid positive report

His close aide prepared it for him, say investigators

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Regent Group Chairman Mohammad Shahed admitted that he made a fake certificate to show him Covid-19 positive, investigators said yesterday.

He prepared the certificate through one of his trusted aides. He asked his aide to collect samples from a Covid-19 positive patient first and then prepare a certificate for him using the sample, they added.

Shahed disclosed this during interrogation, said DB officials.

During a remand hearing in a Dhaka court on Thursday, Shahed alias Shahed Karim claimed that he was Covid-19 positive.

Detectives, however, said he staged the drama of being infected with coronavirus so that he could gain sympathy and police did not get close to him for interrogation.

"Shahed did not have any Covid-19 symptoms," Kazi Shafiqul Alam, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch (DB) Uttara division, told The Daily Star yesterday when he was asked about the matter.

Yesterday was the first day of 10-day remand for Shahed. He tried to sneeze after putting tissue papers inside his nose, according to investigation sources.

He revealed his whereabouts and the journey from Dhaka to Satkhira, said investigators.

Shahed told detectives that he first tried to communicate with some influential people he knew after Rab raided Regent Hospital on July 6.

But when he found the situation went beyond his control, he attempted to leave the country through Akhaura border first but failed, said a DB high official, requesting anonymity.

Shahed returned to Dhaka and stayed for a day. He then went to Cox's Bazar and took shelter in a friend's house.

Investigators said Shahed went to his friend's house in Cox's Bazar from Dhaka in a luxury car which had a fake registration plate so that law enforcers could not get details of his owner.

Investigators are now conducting drives to recover the car.

Then Shahed went to Jashore to cross the border, but he failed again. He finally decided to cross the border from his home town in Satkhira, said an official, quoting him as saying.

A Rab team arrested Shahed in Satkhira's Debhata upazila on Wednesday while he was trying to cross a river to flee to India on a boat.

DC Shafiqul said Shahed is giving different types of information during interrogation, but they are trying to get details of his associates, who are involved in his fraudulent business.

"We got some clues and we are now analysing these so that we can take action against the offenders," he added.

Three shot dead

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Sheikh Jahangir Hossain, former chairman of Atr-Gilatla Union Parishad, who was present at the spot, told The Daily Star that the three brothers were very influential in the area and there was no case against them.

Niloy Sheikh, nephew of the victim Nazrul, told The Daily Star that Zakaria and his men were upset after losing the managing committee election of Mashiali Alia Madrasa.

Tasadbar Ali, another relative of Nazrul, said after losing the election, he threatened to kill Nazrul and several others.

Zafarin is an expelled vice-president of Khulna city Chhatra League.

Mollah Jahangir Hossain, deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police, said one of Zakaria's associates was arrested in Jessore. Several teams are working to arrest other suspects.

Filing of a case is underway, he added.

Prof Emajuddin passes away

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His first namaz-e-janaza was held at Bajme Kaderia Jame Masjid at Katobon following Jummah prayers and a second one was held at Dhaka University central mosque after Asr prayers. He was buried next to his wife at Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard.

Emajuddin, who taught political sciences at Dhaka University, was awarded the Ekushey Padak in 1992 for his contribution to education. He wrote numerous books on national politics.

He was born in 1933 in Maldaha, West Bengal. His family moved to Chapainawabganj after the partition of India. He started his career as a teacher in Rajshahi College. Upon completion of higher studies abroad, he joined Dhaka University in 1970.

A language movement veteran, Emajuddin served as the 21st vice chancellor of Dhaka University, from 1992-1996. He retired in 1996.

Emajuddin served two terms as pro-vice chancellor before becoming VC.

He became vice-chancellor of the University of Development Alternative in 2002. He also worked with the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

He was known at home and abroad for his contributions to education and creative writing. He won the Mahakal Krishni Chinta Sangha Gold Medal, National Literary Parliament Gold Medal, and Zia Cultural Gold Medal

On July 7, a mobile court of Rab sealed off Regent Hospital, owned by Shahed, in the capital's Uttara on charges of issuing several thousand fake Covid-19 test certificates and swindling a huge amount of money.

A day later, Inspector Zulhas Mia of Rab-1 filed a case with Uttara Paschim Police Station against Shahed and 16 others.

Lt Col Ashique Billah, director of Rab's legal and media wing, said, "We have already written to the Police Headquarters requesting it to hand us over the charge of investigation in Shahed's case. But it may take some time as it also requires the home ministry's permission."

CHEQUE BOOK, CAR SEIZED
Meanwhile, Rab arrested two people, recovered a cheque book, signed by Shahed, and his private car from their possession in Narsinghapur of Ashulia on Thursday.

The arrestees are Gias Uddin, 61, and Mahmudul Hasan, 40. Gias is the brother-in-law of Regent Group Managing Director Masud Parvez.

The two were hiding in Ashulia area, said Lt Col Ashique.

In another development, Rab yesterday formed an investigating wing at its HQ to provide support to the victims, cheated by Shahed. The victims can give information, file complaints or seek legal support regarding the Regent issue by calling 01777720211 number of the investigating wing, said Sujoy Sarker, senior assistant director of Rab's legal and media wing.

Seoul revokes permits for N Korean defector groups

AFP, Seoul

South Korea yesterday revoked the operation permits of two defector groups for sending anti-North Korea leaflets across the border, officials said, after Pyongyang furiously denounced their activities and blew up a liaison office.

The move is likely to trigger debate over potential infringements on freedom of expression in the democratic South.

The leaflets -- usually attached to hot air balloons or floated in bottles -- criticise North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over human rights abuses and his nuclear ambitions.

But by sending them, the two groups "severely hindered" the government's "efforts for unification", Seoul's unification ministry said in a statement.



A man is running to safety as three buses compete against each other to reach a bus stop on Topkhana Road near the capital's Jatiya Press Club yesterday. Such rash driving to pick passengers often leads to fatal accidents.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Dropout rise a major concern

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plan on the Covid-19 situation late last month. In the plan, the government body warned of a rise in dropout rates.

An increase in school dropout is most likely to be linked to increased incidences of early marriage, adolescent fertility, and child labour, it said.

The government's "Covid-19 Response Plan for Education Sector" also warned that dropout rates at primary and secondary levels were likely to go up, especially among girls and children from the disadvantaged families.

Following a questionnaire survey, participated by 126 teachers and NGO workers in the education sector, Campe said school dropout will increase as an impact of the Covid-19.

Of the respondents, 84 percent said dropouts will rise in schools, while 80 percent warned of increased absenteeism and irregular attendance at educational institutions. Seventy-one percent said the problem of child labour will aggravate while 58 percent opined there will be a rise in incidents of children marriage.

A BLEAK FUTURE

Although successive government efforts, including providing stipends to students, free distribution of textbooks up to secondary level and other rigorous campaigns, helped check dropout and child marriage rates in recent years, different government and rights group paint a bleak future.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), dropout rate at secondary level was 37.62 percent in 2018. The

dropout rate among girls was 40 percent against 36 percent among their male counterparts.

The overall dropout rate was 61 percent in 2008.

The DPE said dropout rate in primary education was 49.3 percent in 2008, which came down to 17.9 percent last year.

Quoting a survey, officials of the National Institute of Population Research and Training said 65 percent girls got married in 2010 while they were below 18. It decreased to 59 percent last year.

But Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) warns of an increase in child marriages amid the pandemic, which has brought on an economic crisis.

In its latest monthly report, released on July 12, the NGO said 462 girls fell victims to child marriage in June, compared to 170 in May.

The organisation blamed lack of monitoring by local government authorities amid the pandemic for increased child marriage. Closure of schools, social insecurity and poverty are also responsible, it said.

HOW TO TACKLE DROPOUT

The response plan, prepared by the government, proposed strengthening monitoring mechanism and tracking and bringing children back to school to prevent dropout.

It also said re-enrollment campaigns, including participatory community actions and awareness-raising programmes, will be launched.

Rasheda K Choudhury said schools should analyse situations to identify students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out.

His personal assistant arrested

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Haspil worked as Saleh's chief of staff at his venture capital firm Adventure Capital -- but also acted as his personal assistant, according to US media reports.

Detectives believe that the motive for the killing stemmed from Saleh having discovered that the assistant had stolen tens of thousands of dollars from him, despite the fact that Saleh had not reported the man and had set up what amounted to a repayment plan for him to return the money, one of the officials told New York Times.

"This was an act of charity that turned into an act of murder," the

sources said.

However, a spokesman for the New York Police Department disputed the report of Haspil's arrest.

"Last I was told, we don't have anyone in custody," police spokesman Sergeant Vincent Marchese said by phone to Reuters. "There is no arrest. I don't know where they're getting the information from."

According to US media reports, Saleh was killed on Monday, with Haspil allegedly first zapping him with a Taser and then fatally stabbing him.

Surveillance video from Saleh's East Houston Street apartment building

Head teachers and other teachers should maintain contact with such vulnerable students, she said.

Rasheda also said financial assistance to students through government stipend programmes should be ceaseless to encourage students to stay in classrooms.

Contacted, Yusuf Ali, project director of Primary Education Stipend Project (third phase), said they cleared all due stipends by May. Students will get money from the current installment this month, he said.

Under the PESIP, about 1.37 crore elementary students get stipends in four installments in a year in January, April, July and October.

Again, forty percent girls and 20 percent boys, who are among the poorest, from among all the enrolled students or secondary level get stipends under the Coordinated Stipend Programme Scheme. A total of 34 lakh beneficiaries are targeted to hand the benefit in two installments.

Farid Ahmed, assistant director of the project, said due to the coronavirus fallout, they were yet to provide stipends to 20 lakh students.

Secondary and Higher Education Secretary Mahub Hossain said they were looking for ways to reduce the dropout rate. "We will finalise a strategy on how to tackle the situation. We will focus on it."

Primary and Mass Education Senior Secretary Akram-Al-Hossain acknowledged that putting brakes on dropout and child marriage would be a great challenge for the government.

"These [rates] will go up as poverty will increase. We've calculated all these. We will take necessary steps," he said.

shows the businessman and a smartly dressed Haspil riding together in the elevator -- which opens straight out to his apartment -- on Monday afternoon. It was the last time Saleh was seen alive.

The reports also claimed that the killer used his employer's credit card to pay for a car to a Home Depot, on West 23rd Street in Manhattan, to buy cleaning supplies to sanitize the crime scene.

The killer returned to Saleh's apartment the next day to dismember the body and clean up the crime scene, the reports added.

Knowledge unutilised

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the research, thus affecting its overall quality. Budget allocated for research is very low in Bangladeshi universities.

For fiscal 2019-20, the research budget allocated to all the public universities is only Tk 64.40 crore, which is only 1.26 percent of the total non-development budget of more than Tk 5,000 crore.

Dr Firdausi Qadri, emeritus scientist of infectious disease division at icddr, pointed out that maintenance of lab equipment, keeping them certified and accredited is also costly.

The leading experts of infectious disease research in Bangladesh said there are at least three well-equipped virology laboratories in the country now.

Besides, the country has very few trained manpower for maintaining and certifying the biosafety cabinets and equipment, which is important for all the laboratories.

THE WAY FORWARD
Experts think that biological science research can be improved by forming a tripartite relationship between universities, physicians and industries.

DU's Professor Mohammad Manjural said, "Industries such as pharmaceutical companies should support laboratories in the institutes where researchers will work on pathogens, drugs, vaccines, etc which in turn will benefit the industry."

"On the other hand, for clinical trials and to collect study samples, there has to be collaboration between physicians and researchers. It can be done by employing microbiologists, biotechnologists, pharmacists and molecular biologists in the government hospitals and medical institutes."

At present, there is no post for microbiologist, pharmacist or biotechnologists in the government hospitals. Medical institutes have microbiologists posts, filled only

Govt mulls

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"It is true that people do not want to go to hospitals as they think it would be a hassle. The authorities should carry out a campaign so that people gain confidence in hospital management and services," Be-Nazir observed.

According to DGHS data, there are 16 hospitals dedicated for Covid-19 patients in the capital with a total of 6,305 general and 142 ICU beds.

But yesterday's statistics showed that 1,969 patients were undergoing treatment in those hospitals while 4,356 beds were lying vacant. Besides, 35 ICU beds were unoccupied.

There are a total of 14,715 general and 376 ICU beds across the country. But yesterday's data showed that only 4,079 patients were admitted to general beds and 210 to ICU beds.

In the capital, 69.08 percent general beds remained empty. The rate is 72.28 percent for the whole the country.

Sources at the DGHS said analysing the number of admitted patients in the coronavirus dedicated hospitals, it was found that the number was very poor in some hospitals and it was even 'zero' in some others.

The sources also said they found at least five hospitals in capital having a very few Covid-19 patients.

A total of 2,547 people died from novel coronavirus in the country till yesterday. The death rate stood at 1.28 percent.

With a total of 1,99,357 Covid-19 infections, the current infection rate in the country is 22.54 percent.

Bangladesh remains the 17th worst affected country in the world in terms of the number of Covid-19 cases, according to www.worldometers.info.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (South-East Asia) to World Health Organization, said it seems that the number of hospitalised patients is low, but the percentages of detection and death are not going down.

"So, I think it is too early to make such a decision. The authorities should wait for a while and increase the number of novel coronavirus testing before making such a decision," he added.

Boy dies

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suspecting him of being a thief near his house on Boro Masjid Lane around 11:30pm on Thursday.

Soon afterwards, SI Helal arrived at the scene in plain clothes to arrest Maruf, they added.

The police official engaged in a tussle with Maruf's mother and sister as they tried to resist the arrest.

At one point, Maruf managed to flee the scene.

Later, a police patrol team picked up the mother and the sister.

DC Faruk claimed that the two were taken to Agrabad Maa O Shishu Hospital for treatment.

After returning home, Maruf must have assumed that police detained his mother and sister for his fault and handed himself, locals said.

"We don't know what happened there -- we formed a probe committee to assess the details of the incident," the DC said.

Meanwhile, locals staged a demonstration demanding justice for Maruf.

Police filed an unnatural death case in this connection and the body was sent to Chattogram Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

A two-member probe body was formed to investigate the incident and asked to submit its report by 5:00pm yesterday. But the report was not submitted as of 8:00pm.

Action would be taken against SI Helal if found guilty, DC Faruk said.

Covid cases

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Not only the cases, the death toll from the deadly infection almost doubled in the last one month.

Dr Nasima said 51 people died of coronavirus infections in 24-hour from Thursday and the death toll stood at 2,547.

On June 18, the death toll was 1,343.

Of the total dead, 2,011 were male and 536 were female. Death toll is higher among the dwellers of mega cities.

According to DGHS, Dhaka has the highest number of deceased that stood at 1,255, followed by Chattogram (655) and Rajshahi (131).

Over 1,900 people who died of Covid-19 infection aged over 50 years.

The total number of recoveries stands at 108,725 which means 88,085 active case right now exist in the country.

Of them, according to DGHS, a total of 4,289 people have been taking treatment at different hospitals.

Rest 73,796 patients are taking treatment at home.

Contacted over phone, Dr Nasima told the correspondent that they are giving treatment to these patients over phone.

"We're giving them telemedicine," she said.

Asked about monitoring movement of this huge population, she said they could not be able to ensure social distance in Dhaka as people violates health guidelines.

"In rural areas, civil surgeons and local administrations are successfully monitoring movement of patients and in cases they are keeping people in institutional quarantine facilities," she said.

"We're facing trouble to maintain lockdown in areas... As you see people in Wari are not following health guidelines properly," she added.

Bangladesh remains the 17th worst affected country in the world in terms of the number of cases.