

He used power of media

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in Uttara and Gulshan areas and gave jobs to criminals in his newspaper. His future plan was to appoint noted journalists to create a positive image of the daily.

Shahed, who disclosed all this during interrogation in DB custody, was on a 10-day remand beginning on July 16 in the case filed for Covid-19 test report forgery and charging patients for testing and treatment, violating an agreement with the government, they added.

After five days of the remand, he was shifted to Rab custody.

In a development yesterday, Shahed was placed on a 28-day remand in four fraudulence cases -- seven days for each case -- filed against him with Uttara Paschim and Uttara Purba police stations.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury passed the orders after four separate investigation officers produced him before the court with a 40-day remand prayer.

Besides, Regent Group's Managing Director Masud Parvez was placed on a 21-day remand in three cases filed with Uttara Paschim Police Station.

Contacted on July 23, Kuddus Afrad, president of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), said he does not think Shahed used the media to cover up his crime.

"Rather, he used popular and influential figures in the society, people working in the administration. There were cases and warrants against him but law enforcers failed to act and take action."

He further said intelligence clearance is required to get declaration for a newspaper. "When there were cases against him, how was it possible to get the clearance?" he questioned.

COMPLAINTS PILE UP

Since Shahed's arrest in Satkhira on July 15, many including businessmen, rickshaw pullers, job seekers, doctors and lawyers are communicating with law enforcers and filing complaints.

Talking to The Daily Star, a person from the capital's Khilgaon area claimed that he had to pay around Tk 2.5 lakh for his mother's stay in the Uttara branch of Regent Hospital for only seven days.

"My mother was admitted to the hospital with Covid-19 symptoms around 4:00am on June 2. She started to recover just a day after the admission. But the hospital authorities said they needed to keep her in the intensive care unit."

Requesting anonymity, he further said two days later, the hospital authorities shifted his mother to the general ward. On June 8, when they wanted to leave, the authorities handed them a bill of Tk 2.5 lakh.

Another victim said he stayed just

one day in the hospital with a leg injury but the bill came to Tk 50,000.

"I did not stay for a single hour in the intensive care unit but the authorities claimed that they kept me in the ICU," the man from Sylhet told this newspaper recently.

Investigators said they found complaints from a number of victims that they had to pay for an ICU bed despite staying in general beds.

If anyone refused to pay the bills, hospital staffers and in some cases Shahed himself would threaten to take his or her life, said a high official of DB.

"We have found a firearm from Shahed's personal vehicle. In primary interrogation, he told us that though he had bodyguards around him but he used to keep a gun to scare people," the DB official said on July 20.

During a drive on the night of July 18, DB police also recovered five bottles of foreign liquor and 10 bottles of Phensedyl.

Kazi Shafiqul Alam, deputy commissioner of DB Uttara division, last week said two separate cases were filed regarding the arms and liquor recoveries.

Every day, he added, they were receiving various complaints against Shahed and getting information on his fraudulent activities.

On July 7, Rab filed a case against Shahed and 16 other staff of Regent Group and Regent Hospital after a mobile court found proof that the hospital authorities issued fake Covid-19 certificates and charged patients for tests and treatment.

Lt Col Ashique Billah, director of Rab's legal and media wing, said on Thursday that they managed to arrest around 11 out of 17 accused so far in the forgery case.

"We have already got investigation charge of two cases filed against Shahed, including the forgery and arrest with arms in Satkhira. Shahed is now in our custody. Rab has so far identified 48 cases against him," he said.

Earlier, on July 17, Rab formed an investigation cell to provide support to the people who were allegedly conned by Shahed.

"We have closed the phone number of the cell yesterday [July 22]. So far, we received calls from 139 people who claimed to have been conned by Shahed," said Ashique Billah.

He, however, said people will still be able to submit complaints to them through email. Rab received complaints from 21 people through email, as of July 23.

"We have even got complaints that he takes money from different inmates in prison saying he would help them get released," added the official.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

A child runs excitedly towards the whistle of the soon-to-depart train at the Kamalapur Rail Station yesterday afternoon. With Eid-ul-Azha fast approaching, families are leaving Dhaka for their ancestral homes to observe the festive occasion, with the masks they wear a reminder of the growing coronavirus pandemic.

US AG reopens Bangabandhu killer

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Contacted, Bangladesh Law Minister Anisul Huq preferred not to comment on it.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen could not be reached for comments.

The Father of the Nation and most of his family members were killed in a coup d'état on August 15, 1975. His daughters Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana survived as they were abroad at the time, but the investigation into it stopped through an Indemnity Ordinance, which had protected the self-proclaimed killers. The ordinance was abrogated in November 1996 when the Awami League returned to power.

After a lengthy trial, the Supreme Court on November 19, 2009 upheld a High Court verdict, confirming capital punishment of 12 people. Five of the convicts -- Syed Farooq Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Bazlul Huda, AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed and Mohiuddin Ahmed -- were executed on January 27, 2010. Another killer, Aziz Pasha, died in Zimbabwe in 2001.

Those who remain fugitives include Maj (ret) Rashed Chowdhury, Col (dismissed) Khandaker Abdur Rashid, Lt Col (relieved) Shariful Haque Dalim, Maj (ret) Noor Chowdhury, Capt Abdur Majed and Risaldar Moslehuddin Khan.

Bangladesh has been making legal and diplomatic efforts to bring back the fugitive killers. A taskforce was formed in 2010 to locate and bring back the six. However, only two of the six could be traced -- Rashed Chowdhury in the US and Noor Chowdhury in Canada. Two law firms -- in the US and Canada -- were also appointed for lobbying to bring the killers back to the country.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wrote to US President Donald Trump in 2018 for the extradition of Rashed. Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, on different occasions, requested the high US officials for Rashed's repatriation.

After the killing of Bangabandhu, he was deputed to the ministry of foreign and then posted in different missions. He was terminated from jobs in 1996 when he was posted at the Bangladesh mission in Brazil. Instead of coming back to Dhaka, he fled to San Francisco, USA, with his family with visit visas. Within two months, they'd applied for asylum.

The Politico says, "That's where the Justice Department comes in. America's immigration courts aren't part of the judicial branch. Instead, the system that determines who gets to stay here is part of the DOJ, with the attorney general as the ultimate authority. The immigration courts

are massively backlogged, and adjudicating asylum claims can take years."

That's how it went for Rashed. Nearly 10 years after he arrived in the US, an immigration judge granted him asylum. But the Homeland Security (DHS), which handles US government arguments against immigrants' efforts to stay in the US, appealed the judge's ruling. DHS lawyers argued his participation in the coup should disqualify him from receiving asylum.

Then, the BIA took up the case and in 2006 concluded Rashed deserved asylum. But there was still one open question: if he had violated the US anti-terrorism laws.

"So BIA sent the case back to the immigration judge to reexamine that issue. The immigration judge found no issue with granting him asylum, and Rashed's lawyers assumed the matter was resolved," says the Politico report.

For almost 15 years, the case was closed. But now, thanks to Barr, it's back. And immigration lawyers say the move sends a chilling message to people who have received asylum in the US. It signals, they argue, that even after years of successful legal battles, any protection could still be revoked out of the blue," it added.

The government imposed a lockdown on the capital's East Rajabazar last month as an experiment. After that experience, it locked down Wari. The restrictions were lifted on Saturday.

But there is no visible plan to lock down larger areas, as suggested by the national technical advisory committee.

Noted virologist Prof Nazrul Islam, who is a member of the committee, said, "Our focus has changed from Covid-19 control to other issues like corruption [in health sector] and arrest [in forgery cases]."

"We have done some work on treating the Covid-19 patients at hospitals, but we couldn't do anything significant to control coronavirus... We didn't lay emphasis on controlling it in the beginning and we still are not..."

Prof Nazrul, also a former vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said the committee had not put forth a specific plan for Bangladesh.

As the committee found a conventional lockdown is not applicable in Bangladesh, it earlier

suggested implementing a zoning system.

"But that is also not being followed.... I can't comment on the whole country. Local authorities may have taken some initiatives, but I don't see one in Dhaka city to control coronavirus now."

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former Southeast Asia regional director of World Health Organisation, said there should not be any gatherings, especially at cattle markets, inside red zones, or wherever the transmission is high.

"Cattle markets will obviously increase the risks of more transmissions and thus, there should not be any cattle market inside Covid-19 hotspots," he told this newspaper recently.

Prof Shah Monir Hossain, one of the eight members of Public Health Expert Divisional Advisors' Group, said nobody is acting as they should.

"The measures that should have been taken to control it have not been taken. So, the outbreak could not be brought under control," he said on Saturday.

No visible plan 4 months into outbreak

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next few days. The committee's recommendation of not having cattle markets in Dhaka, Chattogram, Narayanganj and Gazipur cities have already been ignored.

The government asked all concerned to follow the health guidelines at the markets.

Seventeen cattle markets have already been set up in the capital with permission from the city corporations.

In the absence of proper monitoring, those guidelines are hardly maintained as cattle markets in and around the capital are drawing large crowds.

Many of the people in the markets are flouting the government order to use face masks.

The cabinet division on June 30 also said neighbourhoods would be marked red, yellow or green, based on the number of cases in the area.

But that decision has not been detailed yet. The authorities experimented with marking zones and locking them down in two areas in the capital and several other ones in different districts.

New security alert before Eid

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Seeking anonymity, a police high-up, told this correspondent that they have already strengthened security measures in and around embassies and different areas of the capital. Checkposts have already been set up at different points in the city.

Contacted, Additional Inspector General of Police Md Kamrul Ahsan, the chief of the ATU, categorically said they always remain alert, and there is no scope for an agency like the ATU to let their guard down at any point of time.

Earlier on Friday, there was a bomb explosion in the capital's Purana Paltan area around 8:45pm. There was no casualty. Later, a bomb disposal team of the CTC unit collected evidence from the spot.

Rahmatullah Chowdhury, in-charge of the bomb disposal team, told The Daily Star that the elements of the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) were different from the ones they had recovered from different militant hideouts in the past.

The IED was designed to cause massive destruction but it didn't contain powerful explosives, he said.

The following day, a bag was left unattended on a motorbike in the capital's Gulistan area. Police found a bomb-like object inside it around

9:30pm and the bomb disposal unit was called in. It turned out to be a bomb hoax.

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, CTC unit Chief Monirul Islam said no one was hurt in the first blast and the second was a hoax. Inside the bag, there was a sand-filled plastic bottle wrapped in tape.

"We are investigating both the incidents."

Asked about the latest alert, Monirul said that at the end of last month, the IS in Iraq and Syria urged their followers all over the world to gather ahead of the Eid-ul Azha. The UN also warned that militancy could be on the rise during the Covid-19 pandemic.

All these are global developments and there is "no specific threat" to Bangladesh, he pointed out.

"But still we have taken some measures and remain alert which we always do ahead of Eid to avoid any untoward incident."

Earlier on February 28 this year, an IED went off at a traffic police box in Chattogram's Sholoshahar, injuring four people, including a child.

A bomb exploded at an Awami League office in Khulna city in September last year. Before that, two persons, including a female police

officer, were injured after a bomb went off near a police pickup in the capital's Malibagh intersection on May 26. Police claimed that all these attacks were carried out by "Neo JMB".

Bomb kills eight in Turkish-held Syria town

AFP, Beirut

A bomb in a Syria border town controlled by Turkey and its Syrian proxies killed at least eight people, including six civilians, yesterday, a Britain-based war monitor said.

The blast from an explosive-rigged motorbike ripped through a vegetable market in the volatile town of Ras al-Ain, wounding at least 19 people, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Such bombings are common in the town, which was held by Kurdish forces before Turkish troops and their Syria proxies seized it last October.

The Turkish defence ministry blamed yesterday's attack on the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which still controls much of northeastern Syria.

PM to open Dhaka-OIC Youth Capital 2020 today

UNB, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will today inaugurate the "Dhaka-OIC Youth Capital 2020" virtually, connecting youths from OIC countries and beyond.

The programme will be opened at 4:00pm with an aim to bring the youth and their spirit together from every corner of the world.

The theme of the mega event is "Parity and Prosperity: For a Resilient Future."

Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Yousef Al-Othaimeen, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel, Youth & Sports Minister of Qatar, Youth and Sports Minister of Azerbaijan, and President of Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum Taha Ayhan are expected to join.

Another 54 die

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8:30am yesterday, 2,275 people out of 10,078 tested were confirmed positive for the virus.

Yesterday's positivity rate was 22.57 percent.

With this, the number of confirmed cases reached 2,23,453, which is around 20.01 percent of all samples tested.

So far, a total of 11,11,558 samples have been tested at 81 labs across the country starting on January 21.

Yesterday, the 81st Covid-19 testing lab in the island district of Bhola started testing samples, Prof Nasima mentioned.

The total positivity rate stands at 20.01 percent, according to DGHS.

Despite the decreasing of daily tests, the positivity rate continues going up throughout this month.

On July 5, the positivity rate was 19.57 percent.

Meanwhile, 1,792 Covid-19 patients recovered in 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday.

The number of recoveries is now 1,23,882, which is 54.44 percent of all confirmed cases.

As of yesterday, 4,226 patients were undergoing treatment at different Covid-19 facilities across the country, while 285 were in ICUs.

There are 15,182 general beds and 533 ICUs for Covid-19 patients countrywide.

Besides, 668 people were put under isolation in the 24 hours.

Among the yesterday's deceased, 40 were male and 14 female. Forty-eight of them breathed their last at hospitals and six at homes. The victims were aged between 21 and 90.

Division-wise: 19 of them were from Dhaka, 10 from Chattogram, eight from Khulna, seven from Rajshahi, six from Sylhet, three from Rangpur, and one from Barishal.

Give drainage

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management system to the two city corporations -- Dhaka South City Corporation and Dhaka North City Corporation.

In a statement, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said according to the corresponding laws, Wasa is responsible for the construction and maintenance of major drainage systems while the city corporations look after connecting lines.

Of the entire drainage system of Dhaka, Wasa looks after 385 kilometres of drainage system whereas the city corporations are responsible for 2,500 kilometres.

Besides, there are 26 canals, a total of 74 kilometres in length, and 10 kilometres of box culverts maintained by Wasa.

"Due to the legal complexities, the organisations blame each other to avert their responsibilities whenever the city suffers from waterlogging during the monsoon," said the TIB executive director.

"That's why it is necessary to amend the Acts and hand over the drainage management responsibility to a single organisation. In this case, the responsibility should be handed over to the city corporations as they represent the public. They need to be given the power to evaluate Wasa's activities," he said.

Saying that Wasa has failed to solve waterlogging problems in previous years too, Iftekharuzzaman added that Wasa in one its reports claimed they have become able to clean 20 out of 26 canals.

However, TIB in its research found that these canals are not cleared; instead, heavy solid waste has clogged the entry points of the canals.

Iftekharuzzaman said Wasa does not regularly monitor maintenance of its canals and drainage. Although responsible officers of Wasa are supposed to inspect drains and canals at least twice a month, they do not do and that creates scope for grabbing.

"Therefore, Wasa has no scope to deny its failure. On the other hand, city corporations could not avert their failures in maintaining drains and waste management," he added.

TIB in its research also found that in many cases, the city corporations do not dispose of the waste of canals and drains after cleaning by Wasa.

The TIB executive director said there remains a question over whether the city corporations are able to properly clean the 2,500 kilometres of drains under their purview.

Thousands of hectares

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Aman paddies washed away by the floodwater, he added.

Contacted, Ahsanul Bashar, deputy director (DD) of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Tangail, said they would cover up the losses.

"We will provide seeds to the farmers who lost vegetables. Those who lost seedbeds of transplanted Aman would also get assistance from our management."

In Thakurgoan, a large amount of maize, green chillies and vegetables have been damaged due to the flood.

"I cultivated maize which were just around two weeks ahead of harvesting. But this floodwater damaged my maize. I have to incur a loss of around Tk 2 lakh," said Babu, of Yakubpur village in Sadar upazila.

In Sirajganj, crops of around 28,300 hectares of land have been submerged causing huge sufferings to farmers.

"I was taking preparation to harvesting jute. But jute on two bighas of lands went under water early this month," said Abdul Hai, a farmer of Betilchar village.

Normally, farmers prepare seedbed for Aman paddy cultivation during monsoon. But prolonged flood has destroyed 265 hectares of seedbeds this year, said Habibul Haque, DD of DAE in the district.

In Bogura, crops worth Tk 72.34 crores, cultivated by some 44,095 farmers, have been damaged by the flood in the first spell, according to DAE.

Rafiqul Islam, a farmer of the Auchar Char in Sariakandi upazila, said he lost 16 bighas of jute due to the floodwater.

"Because of coronavirus, I centred to work in remote Shaol

Char area and cultivated jute on over 16 bighas of land. But the flood has damaged everything. I will have to incur loss of around Tk 1 lakh."

The losses by second spell of flood could not be assessed immediately, said local agriculture officials.

In Gaibandha, crops worth Tk 15 crore were damaged by the first spell of flood. The damages in the second spell could not be assessed.

In Nilphamari, 607 hectors of land of Aman paddy, vegetables and seedbeds -- worth about Tk 1 crore -- was damaged in the recent flood.

The district's agriculture officer Obaidur Rahman Mondol said the affected farmers would be rehabilitated and the authorities would provide them with seeds of different crops and fertiliser at free of cost.

In Manikganj, over 119,256 farmers have been affected as their crops on 30,517 hectors of land went under floodwater in last 26 days from July 1, said Shahjahan Ali Biswas, DD of the district's DAE.

"We are sending the report to the head office regularly. The affected farmers will be given fertiser and seeds during their cultivation after the floodwater recedes," he added.

In Sunamganj and Sylhet, paddy farmers fear that they would miss the chance of cultivating paddy this season as the deadline for preparing seedbeds are at the edge of expiring, while many seedbeds are being damaged by flood.

Around 40 lakhs people of 147 upazilas in 30 districts are affected by flood this year, said a report of National Disaster Response Coordination Centre (NDRCC).

Our Lalmonirhat, Tangail, Bogura, Pabna, Sylhet, Manikganj, Thakurgoan and Nilphamari correspondents contributed to this report.

Libya govt disavows visit by French uprising champion

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's UN-recognised government has disavowed a visit by French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy, a champion of the 2011 ouster of longtime dictator Moamer Gaddafi whose standing has plummeted since the uprising.

Across Libya, the euphoria of the Nato-backed rebellion has long since faded as fighting has raged on between rival governments and feuding militias.

In the government-held west of the country, France is widely resented for the political support it has given military strongman Khalifa Haftar whose forces dominate a rival administration in the east.

Levy flew into Libya's government-held third city Misrata in a private jet on Saturday, airport sources said.

He told pro-government television channel Libya Al-Ahrar that he had travelled to the country as a journalist to write a piece for the Wall Street Journal.