

Ex-BNP MP in Kushtia faces seven cases

Allegation of corruption, vandalising opposition rallies against Shahidul Islam

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Alleged corruption by former BNP lawmaker Shahidul Islam and atrocities by a section of his party men is a talk of the town in Kushtia.

The lawmaker from Kushtia-2 (Mirpur-Bheramara) constituency, now on the run, faces seven cases for vandalising opposition rallies, all filed on February 12 with Mirpur and Bheramara police stations.

Several murders were committed in his constituency during his 10-year tenure as lawmaker from the constituency. Relatives of some of the victims pointed finger at Shahidul but did not file cases. Preparations are on now to file cases against him in connection some of the murders, sources in Mirpur and Bheramara said.

Shahidul was elected from Kushtia-2 in 1996 and 2001 elections.

Sources in law enforcers said, after proclamation of emergency, they raided Shahidul's house to nab him for his alleged corruption and protecting musclemen and outlaws.

His elder brother Touthidul Isam Alam, chairman of Bheramara municipality and president of local Bheramara upazila BNP, was arrested on March 2. He is now in Kushtia jail.

Shahidul started life as a lecturer of Zoology at Bheramara College in 1981. He was removed from service in 1986 after a probe body headed by the then Deputy Commissioner (DC) found Shahidul's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) fake.

Shahidul left the college and went to Dhaka, where he developed relationship with some front ranking BNP leaders.

After fall of Ershad government, Shahidul returned to Kushtia and became involved with BNP.

He tried for nomination in 1991 election but did not get. He however managed to make his wife Selina



SHAHIDUL ISLAM

Sahid a lawmaker from reserved seats.

This opened up scope for Shahidul and gradually he established his supremacy in Mirpur-Bheramara area.

As former BNP lawmaker from the constituency, veteran freedom fighter Abdur Rouf Choudhury, declined to take part in the farcical February 15 polls in 1996, Shahidul availed the chance and became a 'lawmaker' in the one party election that was later scrapped.

Shahidul was nominated in the June 12, 1996 national election and was elected. It is alleged that he used outlawed party cadres to rig vote.

Shahidul allegedly used notorious outlawed leader and the then Gono Bahini (GB) chief Sirajul Islam Siraj alias Koshai Siraj in 1996 election. Koshai Siarj campaigned for Shahidul, intimidating voters not to go to polling centers.

During Awami Lwague rule, when Siraj surrendered to law enforcers at the call of the then home minister Mohammad Nasim in 1999, Shahidul asked a BNP man run the gang earlier led by Siraj. The BNP man was the then chairman of Ambaria Union Parishad. He was killed in April 21, 2004.

Shahidul also brought into his fold Abri Hasan, a top cadre of Janajuddho faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML) in 2000. Abir campaigned for Shahidul in 2001 election.

Three Awami League (AL) activists--Asadul, Sawapan and Ferat Ali--were killed in July 15, 2001, allegedly following an altercation with Shahidul's men over use of low quality materials in a road reconstruction work. A construction company allegedly owned by Shahidul's relative was doing the reconstruction work.

Chhatra League leader Gama, brother of slain Aadul, filed a case with Mirpur police accusing Shahidul. Police dropped Shahidul's name from the charge sheet. The case is still pending as the plaintiff submitted a naraji petition against the charge sheet.

Mirpur upazila BNP president Al-Mamun-ur- Rasul alias Babu Khan was killed in April 2004 by some unidentified criminals when he was returning home from Mirpur Bazar at night.

Soon after the killing, Shahidul phoned local journalists and police and said that Janajuddho cadres did the murder.

But Janajuddho later said its cadres were not involves in the murder, saying the murder was done by hired men in a sequel to internal feud in BNP.

Sources said Shahidul had a feud with Babu Khan over local party politics. The Babu khan murder case is still pending.

Police searched Shahidul's house in Bheramara town on April 1, 2001, arrested his cadre Sanjoy Kumar and recovered one rifle and five revolvers. Police filed case accusing Shahidul but the case is still pending. On March 24 last year, another case was filed against Shahidul in connection with the murder of BCL activists Sanwar Hossain Jibon, Mizanur Rahman Majnu and Miton Hossain.

The case is still pending.

It was gathered that development projects involving at least Tk 600 crore were sanctioned for Mirpur-Bheramara area in last five year.

Nine construction companies carried out the works. Shahidul's relatives owned six of them.

Different sources claimed that huge amounts were misappropriated by the firms owned by Shahidul's relatives.

The company owned by his close relatives got the Tk 85 crore Sagarkhali-Barabila irrigation project work in Amla in Mirpur upazila last year.

They also constructed Mirpur municipality building involving Tk 96 lakh and implemented several project including construction of Talbaria, Chatian and Sadarpur Union Parishad complexes involving Tk 1.5 crore, several primary schools at Tk 2 crore, Mirpur-Poradah road reconstruction work at 55 lakh, Malihad-Sadrapur road at 3.5 crore, Sadarpur-Amla GK canal at 52 lakh, Paharpur-Lakmipur bridge at 1.30 crore and Mosharrapfur bridge at Tk 88 lakh. Sources alleged massive corruption in these works.

Shahidul's musclemen forcibly occupied five government approved sand quarries (balu mahal) in Padma river. Even lessees of the sand quarries could not establish their rights there, some of them alleged.

The five sand quarries are at Baro Mile, Katdah, Krittinagar, Bishalchandi and Minapara on the Padma, leased from the Mineral Resouers Development Bureau (MRDB) in 2003.

'Mongla port still under control of mafia gang'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Action is yet to be taken against eleven members of a 'Mafia group' who virtually controlled all activities at Mongla sea port till last year.

Members of this Mafia group were accused by the parliamentary standing committee on shipping ministry of destabilising activities at the sea port.

The accusation was made by members of the parliamentary standing committee in its two meetings held on April 3 in 2005 and on January 11 last year. They are still active through their men at the port, sources said.

It was resolved in both the meetings that drastic legal action must be taken against the eleven mafia men responsible for making the port a losing concern due to gross irregularities in financial transactions and some other machinations which helped them earn huge illegal money under political influence. The meeting also took note of the fact that they mafia group enjoyed support of a section of corrupt officials of Mongla Port Authority (MPA).

The ministry of home affairs did not go for any legal action then despite several reminders sent by the shipping ministry, sources at Mongla port said.

As per the list sent to the home ministry, members of the notorious mafia group include former president of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industriwies Shaikh Nazrul Islam, president of Mongla Sramik Sangha Shajahan Shikari, proprietor of Mac Shipping Company Kamrul Islam and proprietor of Mongla Cement Factory Anwar Hossain.

Mongla Port incurred a loss of Tk 12.31 crore in 2004-05 financial year, Tk 8.4 crore in 2003-04 and Tk 5.51 crore in 2002-03.

4 illegal pumps seized from Hakaluki haor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Officials of the Department of Environment (DoE) yesterday seized four pumps while those were being used to remove water from Hakaluki haor in Baralekha upazila.

These pumps were fielded there to dry up the water body for fishing, which is illegal, the officials said. Acting on a tip off, DoE officials with the help of police conducted a drive in Kaier Kuna Beel in the haor (water body) and found the illegal pumps. Operators of the pumps fled away, sources at Kulaura DoE office said.

Md. Shibli, Assistant Director at Kulaura office of the coastal and wet land bio-diversity management project (CWBDMP) under DoE told this correspondent that some local people Saturday night informed them about use of the illegal pumps.

The seized pumps have been handed over to Kulaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO). The official said, they seize 29 illegal pumps from Hakaluki haor in last one month.

He said pumping out water and fishing is strictly prohibited in the haor, now under the CWBDMP.

Prof Taher's family seeks speedy filing of charge sheet

RU CORRESPONDENT

Family members of slain Rajshahi University teacher Prof Taher Ahmed yesterday met with the university vice-chancellor and requested for taking steps for trial of the murder.

Prof Taher Ahmed, a senior teacher of Geology and Mining department was killed by allegedly by hired killers on February 01 last year at his campus residence.

Prof Taher's son Sanjid Ahmed Himel yesterday met with RU VC Prof Altaf Hossain at his office and urged him to

request police for early submission of charge sheet.

Himel told newsmen that he also requested the VC for steps to disburse his gratuity and other dues from the university.

The VC assured Himel of necessary steps for speedy submission of charge sheet and disbursement of the money.



PHOTO: STAR

Land grabbers have occupied the bank and shore areas of Beri Lake in Moulvibazar town.

A 'beauty spot' falls to land grabbers

Moulvibazar townspeople demand eviction of encroachers from Beri Lake

OUR CORRESPONDENT Moulvibazar

Beri Lake in Moulvibazar town is shrinking as encroachers have grabbed major portions of the natural water body by filling earth on all sides.

Once called a 'beauty spot' in the middle of the town, the lake came into being over 200 years ago when Monu river changed its course. It was around a 50-acre sheet of water that added to the scenic beauty of the town.

Even few years ago, there was a children's park with amusement facilities on its south bank. Now, major portion of the south bank has gone to land grabbers.

A bus terminal and other business establishments have been constructed on its south bank by encroaching the bed. Some open spaces are still there but those become safe havens for drug addicts after sunset.

On the west bank, a big market has been constructed. A residential area called Berir Char has been created by filling up the bed along the north bank. Land owners in this residential area have encroached the bed of the lake by earth-filling to increase sizes of their plots. Same is the situation on the other sides of the lake.

Moulvibazar municipality owns the lake, once used a flood water retention point. In rainy season, water from different areas like Dargah Moholla, Purbo Sultanpur, Muslim Quarter, Lake Road, Gobinda Shri, Berir Char, West Market and Srimongal Road roll into the lake. The excess water flow out through Kudali Chhara, the main drain of the town.

But the beautiful lake has now fallen into the hands of land grabbers. Talking to this correspondent, many town dwellers asked why an eviction drive is not launched to free the lake from encroachers while

encroachments are being removed from other areas of the district now.

They said the Beri Lake can be turned into a tourist spot like the Foy's Lake of Chittagang.

Journalist M A Salam said, there is no entertainment facility for people of Moulvibazar town. The lake can provide such facility if the encroachments are removed and the banks are buftied in a planned way.

Moulvibazar Municipality Chairman Fayzul Karim Mayun said on several occasions earlier that the municipality had a plan to turn the lake into a tourist spot and that a project submitted to the department concerned was waiting approval.

The town dwellers have demanded that the Beri Lake be freed from encroachers and developed into a recreation spot that would benefit all.

Wife beaten dead for cooking late

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A housewife was beaten to death at Pokkhiyaa village in Madarbania union in Patuakhali Sadar upazila.

The victim has been identified as Kohinoor Begum, 26, wife of daylaborer Jahangir Hossain.

Shahnewaj, Second Officer of Patuakhali Sadar police station, said Kohinoor was beaten dead at night and the body was hung from a tree near the house to show the incident as a suicide. Her husband Jahangir and all members of his family are absconding, the police official said.

Informed by neighbors, police recovered the body and sent it to Patuakhali General Hospital for autopsy. Quoting neighbours, [police said she was beaten for cooking late.

Amjad Howladar, father of the victim, lodged a murder case in this connection but none could be arrested till yesterday evening.

One held with arms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Joint forces arrested Sanjib Kar, manager of BNP leader and Jhalakati municipal chairman Abdul Halim Gazi yesterday.

Halim Gazi was arrested and relief materials were recovered from the house on Saturday. Acting on his confession, law enforcers also recovered a foreign-made revolver while arresting his manager, police said.



PHOTO: STAR

Amropali trees full of buds in a garden at Kongchairi Para in Khagrachhari Sadar upazila.

Amropali creates new hope for CHT farmers

JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

Amropali, a new variety of hybrid mango, is showing signs of a bumper production this year in Khagrachhari.

Amropali cultivation that began in the hills six years ago has opened up great prospects for farmers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), promising hefty gains.

The production in Khagrachhari this year may be much more than that of last year, Horticulture Department officials and farmers said. The hills with suitable soil and climate may be turned into mango orchards as in Chapainawabganj, they said.

Amropali is now being cultivated in at least in 650 small gardens and 46 larger ones in Khagrachhari district, said horticulturist Mizanur Rahman at Khagrachhari Horticulture Centre. Most of the gardens are in Dighinala, Matiranga, Ramgour, Khagrachhari Sadar, Panchhari, Manikchhari, Mohalchhari and Laxmichhari areas.

"Budding started a bit early this year. The climate and soil are suitable for Amropali cultivation in the

(CHT) hills", Mizanur Rahman told this correspondent yesterday.

In a modest target, yield from the gardens in Khagrachhari may be 95, 000 mounds if weather remains favourable for two months more, he said.

The horticulture centre distributed 47,000 Amropali plant in Khagrachhari, Rangamari and Bandarban districts in last three years, Mizanur Rahman said.

But the gardens are facing the biggest threat from brick fields. There are more than 140 brick fields in CHT and around 44 of them are in Khagrachhari, he said. Smoke from the brick fields badly affects mango buds."

Farmer Mongshipru Marma in Kongchairi Para said price of Amropali mango is higher by at least Tk 20 per kilogram than that of other mangoes.

The Amropali has created hopes among hill people as it yields fruit within a short time.

Deputy Director of Agriculture Extension Office TM Monjurul Islam said, as climate and soil in the hills are suitable for Amropali, they are trying to expand its cultivation.

as the ferry channel became silted.

The 18 water vessels and pontoons now lying uncared at Balashi ghat include two passenger ferry boats--MV Sher-e-Bangla, MV Suhruwardi--, three wagon carrier tug boats--MV Titumeer, MV Bahadur Shah and MV Mirjumalla--four wagon ferry barges, two passenger landing pontoons, two ramp pontoons, four speed boats and one marine workshop of Railway marine department.

These are decaying, said a railway marine department official seeking anonymity. The ferry

channel will be silted further and closed permanently if the service is not restored, he said.

Some sources claimed that many valuable equipment are missing from the anchored vessels and pontoons.

Meanwhile, the Railway sold passenger ferry boat MV Sonargaon to Inland Water Transport Authority (IWTA) at Tk 1.84 crore, sources said.

Nearly 3000 people, who worked as labourers or did petty business prior to closure of the ferry service are now jobless.



A vessel (left) and two pontoons of Railway Marine Department lying idle at Balashi ghat in Gaibandha for about two years.



PHOTO: STAR

Tk 100cr rly goods decaying in Gaibandha

Businessmen demand restoration of Balashi-Bahadurabad ferry service for development of northern dists

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Costly water transports and pontoons of railway marine department worth over Tk 100 crore are decaying after railway ferry service between Balashi and Bahadurabad ghats across Brahmaputra river was closed about two years ago.

Local people and businessmen in northern district have been demanding restoration of the ferry services for easy transportation of merchandise including fertiliser and food grains at low cost but it is ignored by the railway on the plea of loss.

Gaibandha chamber president Shajada Anwarul Kadir however claimed that the ferry service can not be a losing business if it is run properly. It should be restored in greater public interest, keeping in view its vital role in development of northern districts, he told this correspondent yesterday.

The Railway authorities closed down passenger ferry service between Balashi and Bahadurabad on June 15, 2005, allegedly due to recurring loss. Subsequently, wagon ferry service was also closed on November 15 last year on the plea of navigation problem