

# Enemy of none, lover of sitar

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Shafiu too was an avid music lover. A follower of mystic bard Lalou, he used to invite Baul singers to his house every week.

Two other RU teachers -- Prof Muhammad Yunus of economics and Prof S Taher Ahmed of geology and mining -- were killed on December 24, 2004 and on February 1, 2006.

An unknown group, calling itself Mujahideen fi Sabilillah, had claimed responsibility for Shafiu's murder in a post on its Facebook page Ansar Al Islam Bangladesh-2.

Given three hours after the murder, the post had also warned "atheists" of similar consequences.

This time, militant group Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack on Prof Rezaul, according to US-based SITE Intelligence Group.

"ISIS' Amaq Agency reported the group's responsibility for killing Rajshahi Univ. prof Rezaul Karim for 'calling to atheism' in #Bangladesh," SITE tweeted at 4:49pm.

Prof Rezaul, however, is known to have never written or spoken anything propagating atheism.

Some colleagues told The Daily Star that he could have been targeted by

extremists since his work promoted folk music and culture in his village.

"He used to organise folk music programmes in his Dargamaria village under Bagmara upazila, once a nest of militants," said a teacher.

Prof M Shahidullah, president of Rajshahi University Teachers Association, said, "It is beyond our imagination that he can be a victim of such gruesome killing. He was never engaged in writing against any person or religion."

Another colleague, Prof Ananda Kumar Saha, said, "Rezaul never engaged in any type of argument regarding any political or religious affairs".

According to people of Dargamaria, Rezaul contributed to building of a mosque and a madrasa in the village. He also established a music school for kids there.

Rezaul's brother Sazedul Karim Siddiquee, an upazila education officer of Shingra, Natore, rushed to the scene hearing the news. He told reporters that Rezaul was a progressive-minded person but had no affiliation with any political party.

The killing sparked off angry protest on the RU campus.

Hundreds of teachers and students

took to the streets with placards and banners protesting the murder.

They blocked Dhaka-Rajshahi highway for 30 minutes while teachers cancelled all classes, demanding immediate arrest of the killers.

The teachers association announced a three-day boycott of classes and exams from today.

Agitating teachers said the murder of Rezaul was the result of authorities' failure to arrest and try the killers of three other teachers.

They also alleged that police poorly handled the murder cases. Sometimes law enforcers tried to cook up stories, adding political colours, instead of finding out the real culprits.

For example, they said police after monitoring Facebook pages and posts arrested three suspected militants from Bogra in connection with the Shafiu murder.

On the other hand, Rab arrested six members of BNP and its front organisations from Rajshahi. At a press briefing, Rab members claimed the arrested ones "confessed" their link to Shafiu killing.

However, the BNP men in court denied their involvement, saying they were forced to confess their link while

in the Rab custody.

Visiting the spot around one hour after the murder of Rezaul, this correspondent saw the victim lying in a pool of blood with his face down near the wall of a three-storey building, some 10 yards from the Rajshahi-Naogaon highway in front of Shalbagan Bazar.

A young girl living near the spot said, "I rushed to the veranda hearing a hue and cry. I saw a man lying upside down with blood sprayed on the wall and ground."

Talking to The Daily Star, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner M Shamsuddin said, "His injury was similar to those the bloggers sustained."

Earlier this month, Nazim Uddin Samad, a secularist online activist, was hacked and shot to death in the capital.

And four bloggers and a publisher were brutally murdered last year. It is believed that they all came under attacks because of their writings and views against religious bigotry.

Reacting to the killing of Prof Rezaul, Amnesty International said the attackers must be brought to book.

Champa Patel, Amnesty International's South Asia director, said, "The vicious killing of Rezaul Karim Siddiquee is inexcusable and those

responsible must be held to account."

"This attack sadly fits the gruesome pattern established by Islamist extremist groups in Bangladesh who are targeting secular activists and writers."

The authorities must do more to put an end to these killings, Patel said.

"Not a single person has been brought to justice for the attacks over the past year," she pointed out in her statement.

**SITAR FALLS SILENT**

"Reading books and playing Sitar were his life," said the victim's wife Hosne Ara Shira at her house.

"He was dedicated to music and cultural activities. Who would kill him? He was so good as a father and a husband."

At the victim's house, there was a sitar on the bed of Rezaul. There were some other musical instruments like harmonium and dugi-tabla in his room.

"He had a great fascination for sitar from the very beginning of his life," the slain professor's son Riyasat Imtiaz Sourav quoted his grandfather as saying.

As if he was talking to the sitar, taking it in his hands, Sourav said, "How can you lose your best friend? Can you say who killed your best friend?"

Sourav's sister Rizwana Hasin Shotovi said her father used to play sitar almost every night before sleep. "Whenever I felt bored, my father played sitar for me. Who will play it for me now?" she said as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Prof Rezaul's sister Jahanara Begum, headmistress of Dorgamaria Government Primary School, said her brother came to the village quite often. He loved children. Roaming here and there, he collected folk music and took photos.

According to villagers, Rezaul was an "open-minded person". He organised kite festival and sports competition in village. He paid winners from his pocket.

Rezaul joined RU in 1983. He was the founder president of Komolganhar, a cultural organisation of youths, and an adviser to RU-based cultural organisation Arani Sangskritik Sangsad.

He published a journal on behalf of Komolganhar to promote cultural activities.

His son filed a murder case with Boalia Police Station accusing unnamed persons.

Rajshahi police formed a six-member team headed by the additional commissioner to monitor the murder probe.

# CPD hails reform measures

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several hundred others.

"Rana Plaza was a symbol of poor compliance. Now it has emerged as a symbol of the efforts towards better compliance," KG Moazzem, additional research director of the CPD, said at a dialogue in the capital yesterday.

The private think-tank jointly organised the dialogue titled -- Post Rana Plaza Developments in Bangladesh: Towards Building a Responsible Supply Chain in the Apparel Sector -- at the Brac Centre Inn with the ILO.

At the programme, the CPD released its third report, prepared in association with 13 organisations and renowned personalities on the disaster.

The report appreciated the financial support provided to the disaster victims by different quarters, including government agencies, donors and international buyers of Bangladeshi readymade garment products.

It said factory inspections have gradually been intensified and many new factory inspectors have been recruited.

"But a large number of building safety problems remains which is a big concern," said the think-tank, adding that the

process of registration of new trade unions was also slow.

At yesterday's dialogue, Srinivas B Reddy, country director of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), claimed that the garment sector was a safer place for around four million workers.

"The immediate priority recognised in the aftermath of Rana Plaza for all export-oriented RMG factories was to undergo structural, fire and electrical safety inspections. This has been completed."

He said the inspections required a huge effort involving a wide range of stakeholders to harmonise inspection standards and to establish follow up procedures.

"All of this work helps create a far firmer foundation upon which future actions to ensure safety in the Bangladesh garment sector and beyond can be based."

"This is a major achievement. However, the RMG factories can only be considered safe once each and every one has carried out the process of remediation to fix faults identified by the inspections."

Also, there remains a widespread

distrust of trade unions. Such negative perceptions pose barriers to the formation of new unions and for existing labour unions to operate effectively.

The trade union registration process should be a formality, carried out in accordance with objective and transparent criteria, he said.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the CPD, said although three years have passed after the Rana Plaza incident, it was still a part of "public and global consciousness".

"I am happy to say that the government and industries have engaged in continuous efforts to take corrective actions."

He also called for putting in place institutions and policies to stop the recurrence of incidents like the Rana Plaza tragedy.

The tragedy unmasks the weakness and oversight in supervision of the factories the building housed. "It has to be ensured that those responsible for the oversight and supervision [of factories] are doing their job."

Rehman said there were severe equity distortions in the global value chain. For example, garments that are purchased

from Bangladesh at \$5 a piece are marketed at Wal-Mart for \$25.

"Unless we have a satisfactory accounting of the determinants of the appropriation of the \$20 which is swallowed up by the value chain, this is going to be a recurring and permanent problem for all those countries that are wishing to make their economic livelihood on the basis of being globally competitive in the export market."

Labour Secretary Mikail Shipar said the Rana Plaza tragedy was a wake-up call for all stakeholders, and that the government took a number of steps afterwards.

He said a fund would be set up within a very short time where 0.03 percent of the exports earnings would be reserved for the welfare of all workers, including those in the garment sector.

With the help of brands and buyers and under the leadership of the ILO, a global trust fund has already been formed to provide the Rana Plaza victims with compensations.

More than \$19 million has been raised for the fund. Until the first week of this month, \$18 million was disbursed

among 3,000 beneficiaries, according to the labour secretary.

Besides, the government provided all sorts of medical facilities at its own expense to more than 1,000 injured people. With the assistance of Thailand, 107 amputees also received artificial limbs.

A total amount of Tk 231 crore has already been distributed among the victims by stakeholders, including the government, garment employers and international brands and buyers.

The Netherlands Ambassador to Bangladesh Leoni Margaretha Cuelenaere said the government, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the ILO, the Accord and the Alliance (formed in response to Rana Plaza disaster), have done a fantastic job.

The Accord is a platform of 200 Europe-based retailers while Alliance is a platform of 28 North American retailers.

"Still we have a lot to do. We are not there yet. Even though there is a lot of progress, the progress is not reflected yet in the image of Bangladesh's garment sector abroad."

Johan Frisell, ambassador of Sweden, said customers were driving the change, and the Accord and the Alliance were the expression of the brands wanting to comply with the expectation of their customers.

BGMEA Senior Vice-President Faruque Hassan said the association has zero tolerance towards workers' safety violation at factories and supports the work of the Accord. "But more needs to be done."

Marcia Stephens Bernicat, US ambassador to Bangladesh, said the international community would like to see the Bangladesh government and the industry regulating themselves.

"But it is really a good day to think in terms of how huge the scope of the undertaking has been and remained."

Ruling party lawmaker Israfil Alam called for a quick trial and punishment of those responsible for the Rana Plaza tragedy.

CPD Distinguished Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya, who moderated the dialogue, said the legacy of Rana Plaza would be to create a safe workplace which would help Bangladesh build modern industries in future.

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