

Five die after eating puffer fish in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Five people, including two children, died and 12 others fell sick yesterday after reportedly eating puffer fish in Jaintiapur upazila of Sylhet.

The dead -- Abdur Rahim, 65, his son Suleman Miah, 26, Lokman Miah, 20, Rahim Ahmed, 10, and Moni Ahmed, 7, -- were from Darbast Uttar Mile village.

The victims fell sick after having puffer fish (locally known as patka fish) bought from a local market on Monday evening, Joyanal Abedin, Jaintiapur upazila chairman, told The Daily Star.

Later, they were taken to the MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital where five of them died yesterday morning, he said.

Law enforcers were investigating the incident, said Shafiqul Kabir, officer-in-charge of Jaintiapur Police Station.

Man mugged Tk 14 lakh in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers snatched away Tk 14 lakh from a private company employee at Dhanmondi in the capital yesterday, said police.

The incident happened on Road-9 around 12:30pm when the victim was taking the money to his office at Mirpur DOHS in a microbus, Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Dhanmondi Police Station, told The Daily Star last night.

He had just withdrawn the amount from a commercial bank in New Market area.

Four muggers walked to the vehicle after it stopped near a traffic signal, shot once at the window and took away a bag containing the money from the victim after brandishing firearms, he said.

The criminals fled immediately. A case was filed with Dhanmondi Police Station, said the OC.

Police are yet to arrest the culprit or recover the money.

It's Drug Admin which is at fault

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for the withdrawal of Rid Pharmaceuticals products from the market. They filed several cases against the company officials.

On November 28, the Drug Court in Dhaka acquitted all the accused in the first of the cases filed, sparking huge criticism of the role of the Drug Administration.

The following day, Health Minister Mohammed Nasim said if the accused were acquitted due to negligence of drug administration officials, appropriate actions would be taken against them after receiving the full verdict.

THE CASE

According to the case documents, drug superintendents Shafiqul and Altaf visited Dhaka Shishu Hospital on July 21, 2009, following reports that relatively more children with renal failure had been admitted to the hospital and many of them had died after taking paracetamol syrups.

The same day, they seized two drugs of Rid Pharmaceuticals -- Temset suspension (paracetamol), and Ridaplex Syrup (Vitamin B Complex) -- in presence of Prof AR Khan and HSK Alam, the director and deputy director of the hospital.

Prof Mohammad Hanif, head of Nephrology Department of the hospital, first noticed the abnormality in the number of renal failure patients and he gave the drugs in question to the director. The drug administration officials seized those drugs, the documents said.

Shafiqul sent the drugs to Government Drug Testing Laboratory at Public Health Institute in Mohakhali and Abu Bakar Siddique, the then assistant analyst of the laboratory, released the results of tests on July 29 that year.

According to the test results, the

sample of Temset was "substandard" as it had less paracetamol (96.42mg/5ml) than the amount (120mg/5ml) claimed by the company. It was also "adulterated and spurious" because it was a syrup, not a suspension (syrup containing solid particles) as claimed.

Ridaplex Syrup was also "substandard" as there was difference between the claimed and actual amount of ingredients in the drug, showed the test results which was mentioned in the verdict.

On August 10 that year, Shafiqul filed the case against Rid's Managing Director Mizanur Rahman, directors Sheuli Rahman and Abdul Gani, and pharmacists Mahbubul Islam and Enamul Haque under section 16 (C) and 17 of the Drug (Control) Ordinance 1982.

On March 9, 2011, the Drug Court framed charges against the five accused under section 16 (A) and (C). Section 16 (A) deals with unregistered drugs while section 16 (C) is about adulterated drugs. Section 17 deals with substandard drugs.

CASE FLAWED

The prosecution produced Prof AR Khan, HSK Alam, Shafiqul, Altaf and Abu Bakar as their witnesses.

But the complainant did not cite Prof Hanif as prosecution witness and prosecution did not take any step to produce him before the court, the judgments said.

"For this reason, it can't be known from where or whom Prof Hanif had collected the drugs," it added.

Prof Khan and Alam testified that the drug samples seized by Shafiqul and Altaf were produced by Rid Pharmaceuticals.

But Shafiqul, also the investigator of the case, testified that he did not probe whether the said drugs were produced

by Rid Pharmaceuticals.

Shafiqul said he did not visit the factory before filing the case and he was unable to say whether the accused produced the said drugs. Name of the company was written on the bottle, he had said.

Altaf, in his testimony, also did not say the samples collected from the Shishu Hospital were produced by Rid Pharmaceuticals.

The court concluded that the prosecution utterly failed to prove "beyond reasonable doubt" that the drugs were produced by the accused company.

It also said section 23 of the Drug Act, 1940, clearly says how to seize, divide and seal a drug sample and it appeared, from their testimonies, that Shafiqul and Altaf were aware of due procedure.

"But, it appears that the procedures were violated directly and knowingly. As a result, the matter whether the drugs produced by Rid Pharmaceuticals were substandard or adulterated remained in the dark," the court said.

About Shafiqul's claim that he could not divide the samples into four parts as he was supplied only two bottles of the drugs, the court said the complainant, taking information from the hospital, should have collected the required amount of the drugs either from the factory or the quality control room or agent or designated drug stores of the company.

The court said the relevant law, which talks about the necessary procedure that complainant should follow after receiving test results, was also violated.

Although a charge for allegedly producing unregistered drug was framed against the accused, no witness was produced to prove the charge, said the court.

"The then drug superintendents

Shafiqul Islam and Altaf Hossain showed sheer negligence, inefficiency and incompetence in taking necessary steps following section 23 and 25 of the Drugs Act, 1940," the court said.

MORE LEFT OUT

Following the death of the children, the government formed a seven-member probe committee to investigate the matter and the committee submitted its report to the then Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque on July 28, 2009.

Ruhul at a press conference that day said Rid Pharmaceuticals obtained licence to produce paracetamol suspension but it manufactured paracetamol syrup violating the law.

"Furthermore, instead of Propylene Glycol, they used poisonous Diethylene Glycol, which is used in tanneries and in the battery industries," he had said.

Thirteen days after the report, Shafiqul filed the case but did not mention the presence of poisonous Diethylene Glycol, said Prof Mohammad Hanif of the Dhaka Shishu Hospital.

"This should have been mentioned in the case ... That was a weakness of the case," Prof Hanif told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides, no autopsy was done on any of the 28 children. According to The Daily Star reports, at least three children died after the probe committee found the presence of Diethylene Glycol in Rid Pharmaceuticals drugs.

Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer, said there was "negligence" from the side of the then police administration too. The police should have filed a murder case against the factory owners and officials but they did not do anything, he said yesterday.

The Daily Star could not reach Shafiqul and Altaf for their comments.

3 JUBO LEAGUE MEN MP gives 72-hr ultimatum for arrest of killers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Ruling Awami League lawmaker in Natore-2 constituency Shafiqul Islam Shimul yesterday set a 72-hour deadline for police to find out the killers of three Juba League activists.

"We will shut down the northern region if the law-enforcement agencies fail to find out the killers within 72 hours," he said. The killers must be punished even if they are party men or members of law-enforcement agencies, he added.

He said this at the namaj-e-janaza of the three in the town.

Juba League men Redwan Sabbir and Abu Abdullah of Natore Sadar upazila's Kanaikhali area and Sohel Rana of Rothbari were allegedly picked up by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) from Tokia Bazar in the town on Saturday night. They were found dead in Dinajpur on Monday morning.

Sabbir's mother in a general diary alleged that Rab picked up her son when he along with two others was having tea at the bazar.

The Rab denied the allegation.

Earlier on August 12, lawmaker Shimul reportedly snatched away Sabbir, an accused in 12 cases for murder, extortion and drug peddling, from Rab's custody.

Explaining that incident, Shimul yesterday said, "Last year Rab personnel arrested Sabbir at a meeting where I was present. I requested them not to arrest him at my meeting and they set him free."

Commanding Officer (CO) of Rab-5 in Rajshahi Mahbubul Rahman said Rab did not arrest anyone called Sabbir in presence of a lawmaker.

"Rab members went there for an investigation. But a misunderstanding occurred between the MP and the Rab personnel over rumours of Sabbir's arrest," he added.

Abu Bakkar Bakul, vice-president of Natore district unit Swachhasebak Dal and also uncle of Sabbir, alleged that BNP leader Ruhul Quddus Dulu might be involved in the murder.

Natore district unit Juba League has meanwhile held a protest rally and marched in a procession in front of Natore Press Club demanding arrest and punishment of the killers.

The three were buried at Natore Central Graveyard yesterday.

Reckless driving costs two lives

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died there later, said Shahbagh police.

Jafar said they seized the car.

The police official, quoting arrestee Shaon, said the car started its journey from Aganagar of Keraniganj and was heading for Green Road.

He added that during primary interrogation of Shaon, police learnt that the owner of the car is one Rezaul Karim Shyamol, a businessman of

Keraniganj.

Rezaul and Shaon, who are friends, were going to the house of a friend, the inspectors said.

Police also came to know that the name of the car driver is Shifat Islam, 26.

Relatives of Shaon, however, told The Daily Star that alongside studying at a private university, he also runs a business in Keraniganj. He was returning home from his shop at Aganagar

last night when Rezaul picked him up to go "sightseeing".

Tutul Miah, son of deceased Shahera, said his mother had been living with her family in Kamrangirchar area for several years.

"She used to sell flowers on the streets. For this reason, when it becomes too late at night to go home, she used to sleep with other flower vendors on the footpath," Tutul, a father of two, told this correspondent.

DMC morgue sources said the body of Shahera was handed over to Tutul after an autopsy.

The body of Hasina was at the morgue as of yesterday evening, as no one came to claim it, added morgue sources.

Tutul filed a case against four people, including the car owner and the driver, in connection with the incident with Shahbagh Police Station yesterday night.

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