

China detains professor who criticised Xi over virus

AFP, Beijing

Chinese authorities yesterday detained a law professor who published essays criticising President Xi Jinping over the coronavirus pandemic and his efforts to consolidate power, according to friends of the man.

Xu Zhangrun, a rare outspoken critic of the government in China's heavily censored academia, was taken from his home in suburban Beijing by more than 20 people, one of his friends said on condition of anonymity.

Xu published an essay in February blaming the culture of deception and censorship fostered by Xi for the spread of the coronavirus in China.

China's "leader system is itself destroying the structure of governance", Xu wrote in the essay that appeared on overseas websites, adding the chaos in the virus epicentre of Hubei province reflected systemic problems in the Chinese state.

The law professor at Tsinghua University, one of the country's top institutions, had previously spoken out against the 2018 abolition of presidential term limits in an essay circulated online.

A friend said yesterday a man claiming to be police had called Xu's wife -- who had been living separately at a university residence -- to say Xu was arrested for allegedly soliciting prostitution in the southwestern city of Chengdu.

Xu visited Chengdu last winter with a number of liberal Chinese scholars, although it is unclear if the arrest was connected to the trip, the friend said, calling the allegation "ridiculous and shameless".

Xu was placed under home arrest last week, the friend said.

After Tsinghua reportedly barred Xu from teaching and conducting research in 2019, hundreds of Tsinghua alumni -- and academics from around the world -- signed an online petition calling for him to be reinstated.

Fair price eludes

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"We asked the farmers how much it cost them to harvest paddy this year, and how much it would have cost had the pandemic not struck," said Dr Narayan Das, senior research fellow at the BIGD, while presenting the findings at a webinar yesterday.

The study, based on a rapid survey titled "Effects of Covid-19 on Boro Rice Farmers" was carried out between May 20 and June 3. To ensure that households affected only by the pandemic were taken into account, those hit by cyclone Amphan were selectively taken out.

About 43 percent of the land considered for the survey was rented, meaning the farmers tilling those land were sharecroppers.

In addition to Narayan, the research team comprised of Dr Imran Matin, executive director of BIGD, and research associates Md Saiful Islam and Semab Rahman.

One of the major reasons for a rise in production costs was the labour shortage. Because of the lockdown, movement of labourers was restricted, leading to high labour wages. Sixty-five percent of the farmers interviewed cited increased labour costs as a reason, said the researchers.

Dhaka and Chattogram divisions saw the highest rise in wages, they said.

Meanwhile, 40 percent of the respondents said the cost of pesticides rose, 36 percent said the cost of fertiliser went up, 21 percent talked about irrigation costs and 20 percent pointed at increasing transport costs.

The study found that the yield loss per acre due to the pandemic was 7 percent. "If we extrapolate that for the total amount of land cultivated for Boro, nationally, the yield loss this year amounted to 4.82 crore maunds, worth Tk 3,687 crore," said Narayan.

Labour shortage was also the most highly cited reason for the drop in production volume.

Dr MA Sattar Mandal, emeritus professor at Department of Agricultural Economics and former vice-chancellor of Bangladesh Agricultural University, however, said according to his research, the labour cost was less.

"My personal finding is that the wage rate was in fact less because there was a movement of people from urban areas to rural ones. They were available as farmhands," he said.

Speaking at the webinar, Md Nasiruzzaman, secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, said, "We had a labour shortage during the lockdown, but we tried to overcome that by supplying combined harvester machines."

Sudhir Chandra Nath, business director at ACI Seed, pointed out that while procuring rice, the government prefers rice millers who can maintain moisture control of the harvest, thereby depriving farmers of the government-set prices.

"The government should purchase grain from the farmers instead of rice from the millers," he said.

M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, senior advisor to BIGD, also spoke at the event.

The battle gets even tougher

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Triage is the process of determining the priority of a patient's treatment based on the severity of their condition or the likelihood of their recovery with or without treatment.

After the prime minister's intervention, doctors were provided with proper PPE, and the number of new infections reduced.

No hospital in the country has an infection prevention and control programme, he said, adding that there should have been one or more experts to teach health workers how to use PPE.

In a letter to the health minister last month, the BMA said the health ministry and the Directorate General of Health Services were responsible for the infections among doctors.

The ministry made arrangements for treating journalists, police, lawyers and people of several other professions, but it did not take similar steps to ensure treatment for the frontline fighters, the letter said.

BMA called for dedicating Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) Hospital or another facility for the infected doctors.

Nirupam Das, chief administrator at BDE, said hospital infections were happening simply because of a lack of preventive measures.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Of the 62 doctors who died, at least 42 were aged above 60. Most of them were professors or had long experiences. They could have played a major role in a crisis like this, said Ehteshamul.

Besides giving treatment, they could guide the young doctors to become skilled physicians. They could also play important policy making roles in the health sector, he added.

Many of the senior doctors had comorbidities and it was difficult to save them from Covid-19, he said.

Six to seven of them worked at ICUs. "In our country, no hospital has a negative pressure room. As a result, doctors get infected while working at the ICUs."

Negative pressure is an isolation technique used in hospitals to prevent cross-contamination from room to room.

Doctors who are involved in intubation and nebulisation are more vulnerable to infection, Ehteshamul added.

Golden voice goes silent

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treatment.

His last rites will take place in Rajshahi, where he was undergoing treatment after returning from Singapore.

Composed by renowned musician Alam Khan, the song Dak Diyachhen Doyal Amare (1982) put Andrew under the spotlight, after it gained massive popularity. His lifelong dedication to music has earned him many awards and accolades.

The multiple-time National Film Award winner is famous for evergreen songs, including Jiboner Golpo Achhe Baki Olpo, Haire Manush Rongin Phanush, Amar Shara Deho Kheygo Go Mati, Amar Buker Moddhe Khane and Amar Babar Mukhe Prothom Jedin Shunechhilam Gaan, among others.

Andrew Kishore was diagnosed with Diffuse Large B Cell Lymphoma (cancer in both adrenal glands) on September 9 last year.

His treatment started at the Singapore General Hospital, where he underwent chemotherapy. After a nine-month battle, he finally returned to Bangladesh from Singapore on June 11 this year. He was taken to his home in Mirpur upon arrival. However, he

was soon taken to his birthplace in Rajshahi, where he breathed his last.

The maestro mesmerised music lovers with his voice since the '80s and was once the highest-paid playback singer. Born and brought up in Rajshahi, he later came to Dhaka and established himself as a playback legend.

The singer entered the film industry with the song Ek Chor Jaye Chole for the film Protikkha and recorded thousands of songs as a playback singer.

Andrew won the Bangladesh National Film Award for Best Male Playback Singer eight times for films Boro Bhalo Lok Chhilo (1982), Surrender (1987), Khotipuron (1989), Padma Meghna Jamuna (1991), Kabul (1996), Aaj Gaye Holud (2000), Saaighor (2007) and Ki Jadu Korila (2008).

As a patriot, he would always wish for the welfare of the country and its people. He had a great faith in the present generation of singers, who he believed to be creative and energetic.

Artists like Andrew Kishore come once in a century. His legacy will forever be etched in the musical history of Bangladesh.



Standing in knee-deep water, a man prays near the grave of his loved one in the flood and erosion-hit Kajirsura union of Madaripur's Shibchar upazila. The Padma has already devoured a nearby mosque and the man fears it could be the last time he would be able see the grave. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Envoy defended lawmaker Shahid

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he had any specific information about the investigation initiated by the Kuwait's interior ministry.

"In response, the reporter said he heard it from his sources. I asked him about the name of the MP and two others, but he said he didn't know the names and did not mention the name of the MP as well," he wrote in the letter.

Abul Kalam said human trafficking happens when people illegally travel from one country to another and then asked if any such thing happened in this case. In response, the reporter said thousands of Bangladeshis were taken to Kuwait to work for these companies, the letter continued.

The ambassador then told the reporter that recruitment of foreign workers requires lamina (a no objection certificate) and visas and Bangladeshis were recruited following the same procedures. And he asked how this was human trafficking then.

"The reporter failed to give any good answer to this question. This proves that the news report was motivated," Abul Kalam wrote in the letter.

Kuwaiti authorities ban travel of any foreigner accused in a criminal case and arrest him on entering the country, he told the ministry, but Shahid did not face any such situation during his entry into Kuwait.

"He [Shahid] has been having his normal movement in Kuwait for the last one week and operating his businesses," the ambassador wrote in the letter.

Kuwait's General Department of Criminal Evidence issued a "Good Conduct Certificate" while its interior ministry's Criminal Evidence Department issued a "Not Convicted" certificate to the MP, it continued.

"We also inquired into the matter with Kuwait's ministries and divisions concerned but got nothing of what was published in Al-Qabas. We sent a rejoinder to the newspaper and asked them not to write anything involving the Bangladeshis without confirmation," the letter stated.

After Shahid's arrest last month, Abul Kalam told The Daily Star that he sent a letter to the Kuwait foreign ministry asking for details of why the MP was arrested, but has not yet received a

response.

On June 25, State Minister Shahriar Alam told this correspondent, "We have asked whether the ambassador could give us any more updates on Papul's arrest but there has been no concrete feedback yet."

JOURNOS BLACKLISTED, DEPORTED

In the last two years, the Kuwait government deported at least two Bangladeshi reporters from the country -- allegedly after the Bangladeshi embassy's complaints to the Kuwaiti CID against them.

Ehsanul Haque Khokon, Jamuna TV correspondent in Kuwait, said he was blacklisted and deported by the Kuwaiti authorities, allegedly after a complaint by the Bangladesh Embassy.

In a complaint to the foreign and expatriates' welfare ministries, Khokon said he went to the embassy for an interview of Ambassador Abul Kalam on January 17, 2018.

That was the day when around 500 Bangladeshi migrants were there with complaints of non-payment and at one stage, attacked the embassy.

A few days later, he said, Kuwait CID summoned him to its office and detained him, citing a complaint from the Bangladesh embassy. Khokon was released by CID after three days. He said he called the embassy and wanted to know about the complaint but was told he wouldn't have any problems.

In September 2018, Khokon came to Bangladesh on leave and flew back to Kuwait on November 27. However, Kuwait CID arrested him at the airport and sent him to jail.

"As I asked for the reason of arrest, CID said it was because of Bangladesh embassy's complaint. If the embassy wants, I could be released because the Kuwait government had no complaint against me."

A month later, Kuwait authorities deported him to Bangladesh, Khokon wrote in his complaint to the ministries complaint on March 11 this year.

Banglavi's Kamrul said he had no complaints from his employer or the Kuwait government but he was arrested by Kuwait CID on October 29 last year, following a complaint by the

Bangladesh embassy. He was deported to Bangladesh a month later.

In a complaint to the foreign and expatriates' welfare ministries on February 19 this year, he said he had been blacklisted from entering the country though he could have worked 10 more years in Kuwait.

"In my experience of working in Kuwait for over two decades, I realised the officials and employees at the Bangladesh Embassy now are more involved in corruption than those in the past," he said in the complaint.

Kamrul told The Daily Star, "We tried to focus on Bangladeshi migrants' sufferings and exploitation. That's the reason we were deported and blacklisted, I guess."

Asked about the matter, State Minister Shahriar Alam said, "I am not aware of such deportation."

Ambassador Abul Kalam did not respond to requests for comment on the allegations brought by journalists.

MP THREATENED JOURNOS TOO

Five Bangladeshi journalists based in Kuwait -- Kamrul Hasan of Banglavisoin, Jalal Uddin of RTV, Mahmudur Rahman Mahmud of Ajker Surjodoy, Al Amin Rana of Dainik Yad and Sheikh Nizamur Rahman Tipu of Driшти Nandan Sylhet -- had written to the Bangladesh Embassy back in 2015, complaining that Shahidul and his cohorts had threatened them at various times.

Shahid once asked Kamrul to do a story naming him as the chairman of the Bangladeshi community in Kuwait, read the letter. When Kamrul replied that this was not possible as the MP was the self-declared chairman of the community, Shahid said he would see how he works in Kuwait.

Jalal Uddin of RTV said he was once asked to attend a programme of Shahid at the Hayat Hotel in Kuwait, but he could not cover the event because of office duties. Following this incident, Shahid's associate Abdul Mannan threatened him.

"On several occasions, Kazi Papul threatened us with harassment using the Kuwaiti administration," the journalists said in the letter, sent to the then Bangladesh ambassador on February 18, 2015.

Malaysia offers

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undocumented migrants," mentioned the official.

The developments come after Malaysia partially reopened its economy on June 10 with Covid-19 cases falling below 10 a day. Between July 1 and 5, the number of daily cases was between 1 and 10. A total of 8,663 people got infected with the virus till yesterday, and of them, 121 died.

Malaysia has also allowed reopening of childcare centres and kindergartens, cinemas and spas since July 1, attaching to it conditions that include social distancing and good personal hygiene practices.

Talking to this newspaper, AbuHayat, an independent Bangladeshi researcher based in Kuala Lumpur, said, "There was a fear that job opportunities will be largely lost. But now many of the Bangladeshi migrants are rejoining work after the reopening. This gives a lot of relief."

Still, there are many who don't have jobs, he pointed out.

Regularisation of undocumented workers and allowing the jobless to switch companies can help them greatly, he said.

Executive Director of Malaysian Employers' Federation Shamsuddin Bardon said a lot of foreign workers in manufacturing and services sectors were affected by the Covid-19 fallout.

On the other hand, the palm oil and rubber plantations are facing a shortage of workers, he mentioned.

"There is a shortage of 65,000 workers in plantations... It caused an estimated loss of 13 billion Malaysian Ringgit [more than \$3 billion] last year," he told this correspondent over the phone from Kuala Lumpur on Sunday.

"We are urging the Malaysian government to allow transfer of foreign workers to plantations from other sectors as recruitment of foreign workers has been suspended till the end of this year," he added.

On its Facebook page, Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur on June 22 said Malaysia allowed transfer of foreign workers from one company to another of the same sector, not to a different sector.

But if such transfer is allowed, it will be a very welcome decision, Jahirul Islam, labour counsellor of Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia, told The Daily Star.

Switching companies requires permission from the current and future employers and also the authorisation of Malaysia's home ministry and the labour department, he mentioned.

The Bangladeshi workers, who want to change companies, should communicate directly with the high commission, instead of doing it on their own, he said.

"We are holding talks with the Malaysian authorities for regularising the undocumented workers."

Of around eight lakh Bangladeshis in Malaysia, an estimated two lakh could be undocumented, according to officials.

Bangladesh may

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Dhaka division, 11 from Chattogram, four from Barishal, three each from Rajshahi and Sylhet, and two each were from Khulna, Rangpur, and Mymensingh divisions.

According to latest statistics of worldometers.info, Bangladesh remains 18th worst affected country in the world in terms of all confirmed novel coronavirus cases. In the list of 213 countries and territories, France and Columbia was in the 17th and 19th position respectively yesterday.

On March 8, the authorities reported the first three Covid-19 cases in Bangladesh. The first death was recorded on March 18.

Two of the first three cases were men who returned home from Italy and the other was a woman relative of one of the returnees.

The first deceased, aged over 70, had morbidity.

By the end of March Bangladesh had reported 51 confirmed cases and five deaths.

Last month, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases rose by around one lakh as the number of daily RT-PCR tests increased significantly. Experts, however, say the number is still inadequate.

Of all the confirmed cases in Bangladesh, 76,149 Covid-19 patients have recovered. Among them are 3,524 who recovered in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday. The total recovery rate is 45.98 percent.

During the 24-hour period, 14,245 samples were tested in laboratories across the country. The infection rate was 22.47 percent.

The total number of tests rose to 860,307 until 2:30pm yesterday. So far, the rate of positive cases was 19.25 percent.

CLARIFICATION

Novoir in a clarification to the report titled "Sloppy Biman stays grounded," published in The Daily Star on 28 June said the airlines' base fare was Tk 2,500, not Tk 2000 as the report claimed, since the private airlines resumed its operation on the domestic routes from June 1.

The clarification also said its Managing Director Mofizur Rahman didn't make the comment that ticket prices are not the biggest concern at the moment.

Rivals pull back troops

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"strictly respect and observe" the Line of Actual Control -- the de facto border between India and China -- and should not take any unilateral action to alter the status quo, the Indian government said.

The two sides agreed that "it was necessary to ensure at the earliest complete disengagement of the troops along the LAC and de-escalation from India-China border areas", New Delhi said in a statement.

"In this regard they further agreed that both sides should complete the ongoing disengagement process along the LAC expeditiously," the statement added.

In response to a question on whether China had moved back equipment in the Galwan valley, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said both sides were "taking effective measures to disengage and ease the situation on the border".

"We hope India will meet China halfway and take concrete measures to carry out what both sides agreed to, continue to closely communicate through diplomatic and military channels, and work together to cool down the situation at the border," Zhao told a news conference yesterday.

Reports of the pull back in the last 24 hours have emerged three days after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to a Ladakh forward post, where he addressed thousands of troops and asserted, without naming China,

that "the age of expansionism is over and expansionist forces have either lost or were forced to turn back."

Last Wednesday, commanders of the Indian and Chinese armies met for a third round of talks after the Galwan Valley dash. The talks went on for 12 hours.

The Lieutenant-General-level talks have focused on reducing tension at the LAC after weeks of a tense face-off including physical fights in early May at another disputed hotspot in Sikkim.

The progress from talks, sources had said, would be dependent upon China agreeing to move back to its positions before the tension in the area started building-up in April.

Recent satellite images are proof of multiple Chinese intrusions across the LAC and the deployment of heavy weaponry and Chinese construction activity. The images, widely used by Indian media, had indicated that the Chinese had illegally occupied 423 metres of Indian territory in the Galwan valley.

Images acquired by NDTV from Planet Labs showed a significant consolidation of Chinese forces in Ladakh's Pangong Lake region.

CAUGHT BY SURPRISE

Indian soldiers who died in close combat with Chinese troops last month were unnamed and surrounded by a larger force on a steep ridge, Indian government sources, two soldiers deployed in the area and families of the

fallen men said.

One of the Indian soldiers had his throat slit with metal nails in the darkness, his father told Reuters, saying he had been told by a fellow soldier who was there.

Others fell to their deaths in the freezing waters of the Galwan river in the western Himalayas, relatives have learned from witnesses.

Reuters spoke to relatives of 13 of the men who were killed, and in five cases they produced death certificates listing horrific injuries suffered during the six-hour night-time clash at 14,000 ft (4,267 metres) amid remote, barren mountains.

Three of the dead men had their "arteries ruptured in the neck" and two sustained head injuries caused by "sharp or pointed objects", the death certificates seen by Reuters said.

Three of the Indian families said they had been told by soldiers who were commissioned to bring the bodies back to them that some combatants pushed each other into the fast-flowing Galwan river.

The government official in Delhi also said bodies of some soldiers were fished out of the river the next morning. Some had succumbed to hypothermia, the official added.

The Galwan valley incident was the first time in 45 years that soldiers had died in combat on the Asian giants' long-disputed border.

Two masters, 2 drivers of Mayur-2 responsible

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The recommendations include giving training to launch masters and drivers properly, installing modern technology at launches so that masters can get signals about the presence of nearby vessels earlier, and shifting a dockyard from Mirebagh along Buriganga elsewhere as many launches anchor there to get them repaired, which may cause such accidents.

BIWTA Joint Director Zainul Abedin, who is leading the BIWTA-formed four-member committee, said they submitted the report yesterday.

But the authorities would get it today as they submitted the report after office hours, he added.

Meanwhile, a seven-member probe body, led by Shipping Ministry's Joint Secretary Rafiqul Islam Khan, was supposed to submit its report to the ministry yesterday.

"The committee will submit the report tonight [yesterday], and the state minister for shipping will brief the media about the findings of the report at 1:00pm tomorrow [today]," Shipping Secretary Mezbah Uddin Chowdhury told this correspondent last night.

On June 29, the accident happened when Mayur-2 slammed into Morning Brid in the Buriganga at the capital's Shyambazar.

The following day, Shamsul Alam, sub-inspector of Sadarghat River Police

Station, filed a case with Keraniganj Dakshin Police Station accusing seven by name and many unnamed persons.

The seven accused are: Moyur-2 owner Mosaddek Hanif Swad, Abul Bashar Molla, second-class launch master, Jakir Hossain, third-class launch master, Shipon Hawlader, and Shakil Hasan, both second-class drivers, and two other staffers Nasir Mridha and Ridoy.

River police are investigating the case.

Contacted, Khandoker Faridul Islam, superintendent of police (Dhaka region) of River police, told this correspondent that they were trying their best, but could not arrest any of the accused till yesterday.