

Ex MP charge-sheeted in trader murder case

Probe finds involvement of 14 others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former lawmaker MA Awal was the mastermind behind the killing of trader Md Shahinuddin, a police probe found.

The murder in front of the victim's seven-year-old son in broad daylight in the capital's Pallabi on May 16 last year made national headlines.

After a probe for around nine months, Syed Itekhhar Hossain, investigation officer and an inspector of the Detective Branch of police, submitted a charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka on Monday, stating that the trader was killed under Awal's direction.

Besides the former Laxmipur-1 MP, 14 others were involved in the killing, the probe report said.

They are Sumon Bepary, Mohammad Taher, Golam Kibria Khan, Mohammad Murad, Titu Sheikh, Mohammad Rocky Talukder, Nur Mohammad Hasan, Mohammad Sharif, Iqbal Hossain, Tariqul Islam Imon, Tuhin Miah, Shafiqul Islam, Harunur Rashid and Ibrahim Sumon.

According to the charge sheet, Awal and Shahinuddin got locked into a conflict as the former lawmaker failed to grab the latter's land for a project in 2004.

Awal had drawn up a blueprint for the killing with Sumon and Taher in his Kalabagan office, it further said.

On May 16, Sumon and 12 others, whom he had hired for the murder, went to Mirpur 12 after asking Shahinuddin to meet them there to "settle the land dispute".

Around 4:00pm, Shahinuddin arrived at the spot with his son.

In front of the child, the group swooped on him and indiscriminately hacked him with sharp weapons, killing him on the spot.

According to the charge sheet, Sumon then called Awal on the phone and said, "Sir, finished."

MA Awal was arrested in the case on May 20 last year. After remand, he was sent to jail on May 26.

The IO had dropped names of 13 accused from the charges as their involvement was not found during the investigation.

He also appealed to the court to issue arrest warrants against Shafiqul and Ibrahim as they were shown fugitives in the charge sheet.

During the investigation, Sumon, Rocky, Murad, Nur, Sharif and Iqbal gave confessional statements before magistrates on different dates.

Two others accused – Monir and Manik – were killed in "gunfights" with law enforcers.

The next hearing on the case is scheduled for February 17.



Passengers heading for Babubazar in Old Dhaka from Kamrangirchar take risky rides on an illegal battery-run three-wheeler and a rickshaw van. Use of such transport by commuters goes on unabated due to lax enforcement of law. The photo was taken at Babubazar end of Buriganga bridge-2 yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

ANTIMICROBIAL API

Kirtankhola worst affected in the world

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

The Kirtankhola river has the greatest excess of an antimicrobial API in the world, according to a global study that found levels of metronidazole in the river water to be more than 300 times the safe limit.

In an article titled "Pharmaceutical pollution of the world's rivers", the researchers said the findings are crucial for Bangladesh as environmental exposures of antimicrobial APIs (active pharmaceutical ingredients) may result in antimicrobial resistance (AMR) crises locally and globally.

Antimicrobial APIs come from antibiotics, according to the article published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal on Monday.

Besides, the study indicated that the surveillance of pharmaceutical waste management in the country is lackluster, experts said.

Tapos Kormoker, one of the 127 researchers involved in the study, told The Daily Star yesterday that it will take another study to know the reason for the high concentration of metronidazole in the Kirtankhola. "The revelation indicates a very

dangerous situation. The germs will easily develop resistance against metronidazole at community level as the river water is consumed by many means," Dr Muniruddin Ahmed, professor of the Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacology of Dhaka University, told this newspaper yesterday.

The Kirtankhola was one of the 258 urban-centric rivers that have been surveyed in 104 countries in all the continents, according to the article.

A total of 61 APIs was measured under the study.

Tapos Kormoker, a researcher from the energy management department at Patuakhali Science and Technology University, collected water samples from 10 points along 2.5km of the river near Barishal city to measure the API concentration in April 2018.

Of all the APIs measured, concentration of 60 were found within the safe limit.

"The higher concentration of metronidazole indicates that waste containing metronidazole APIs are being discharged into the river without treatment and waste of industries, where different types of chemicals are used, may be the main factor," Tapos said.

About other APIs, he said, "Around four years have passed since we measured the water. So, it is highly likely that most other APIs have also crossed the limit."

"Most probably, the water in other urban-centric rivers, especially the three rivers near Dhaka city, have become polluted with APIs." Metronidazole is an antibiotic and antiprotozoal medication used either alone or with other antibiotics to treat pelvic inflammatory disease, endocarditis, and bacterial vaginosis, according to the experts.

Prof Muniruddin Ahmed said, "The API pollution is not good at all and requires controlling. But the Directorate General of Drug Administration does not have much control over it."

According to DGDA officials, each pharmaceutical factory must treat their liquid waste through effluent treatment plants (ETPs) while solid waste has to be incinerated.

Md Ayub Hossain, a director and spokesperson of the DGDA, said, "No pharmaceutical company can operate a plant without an ETP. Besides, they must follow proper waste management procedures. We have regular surveillance in this regard."

The sun comes

FROM PAGE 1

Sandhya was put on vasopressor support as her blood pressure dropped, a hospital official said, adding, "She suffered a massive heart attack at around 7.30 PM [local time], following which she expired."

Termed Sandhya "Bharat Ratna and "Sur Samraggi", Mamata said the singer would be cremated with full state honours this evening.

The chief minister announced the singer's body would be kept at Kolkata's cultural landmark Rabindra Sadan today for her admirers to pay their last respects from 12:00pm before cremation.

Mamata said she would cut short her ongoing tour of north Bengal and reach Kolkata tomorrow evening to pay her last respects.

Cutting across borders, Sandhya had become the musical voice of an era of romance, where Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen ruled the matinee lights.

Born in Kolkata on October 4, 1931, she took music lessons from Santosh Kumar Basu, AT Kannan and Chinmoy Lahiri in late 1940s. But she began her formal training under Patiala Gharana under legendary Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. Under his tutelage, she mastered the art of Indian classical music and later sang over 1,000 songs throughout her career.

Sandhya won the national film award as Best Female Playback Singer

for her songs in the films "Jai Jayanti" (1972) and "Nishi Padma" in 1970. She received the Banga Bibhushan, the highest civilian honour in West Bengal, in 2011.

She recorded her first song in 1945 and her first Durga Puja number came out three years later. That was the year when she lent her voice to songs, written by Pabitra Mitra and composed by Sudhirlal Chakrabarty "Kaar banshi baajee", and "Keno tumi dure chole jaog."

"Ogo more geetimoy" was among the songs that helped her win over people in 1950.

Sandhya has sung for numerous Bengali and Hindi films and worked with leading music directors, including SD Burman, Madan Mohan, Naushad, Anil Biswas and Salil Chowdhury.

Her body of work was expansive – ranging from classical to modern. In the twilight of her life, she had expressed her desire to record more classical songs – a wish that remained unfulfilled.

Condoling her death, Hindustani classical maestro Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty said, "It was a personal loss for me. She was a mother figure for all of us. I still can't believe she is no more."

Yesteryears' actress Madhabi Mukherjee, whose movies Sandhya sang in, said, "I shared a special bond with her. She was at times like an elder sister and like a mother to me."

5 lakh still on the road

FROM PAGE 1

10.13 LAKH UNLICENSED DRIVERS
 Till June 2021, BRTA issued 37.63 lakh driving licences against 47.76 lakh registered vehicles, indicating that 10.13 lakh vehicles are being run by unlicensed drivers.

The actual number of licensed drivers may be less than the number of licences issued because many people collect more than one – one for a motorbike or a light vehicle and another for a heavy vehicle, a BRTA official said.

Moreover, more than 10.20 lakh unregistered vehicles, including locally-made "Nasiman" and

"Kariman", are plying roads without undergoing any fitness test. Drivers of those do not have any licence either, said people involved in the transport sector.

SITUATION GETTING WORSE
 Transport expert Prof Moazzem Hossain said there was a trend among drivers to run vehicles without a licence or with a fake one. Besides, many vehicle owners avoid fitness test for fear of hassle at the BRTA office.

The trend has grown now, resulting in the rise in the number of accidents mainly because of the BRTA's management incapability and a lack of

transparency, he said. For example, BRTA provided a very limited number of digital licence cards to drivers over the last two years. It provided manual tokens to licence seekers and extended time for the delivery of licence cards several times, creating scope for using fake licences, Moazzem told The Daily Star on February 9.

When all these are making the roads riskier, plying of a huge number of unregistered three-wheelers and motorcycles on highways is causing the rise in road accidents, he said.

"As the government agencies are failing to

discharge their duties properly, the overall road safety situation is becoming more complicated now," said Moazzem, also a former director of Accident Research Institute at Buet.

Asked about the reason for the rise in unfit vehicles, BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said they have ensured that owners have to take their vehicles to BRTA offices for fitness test.

Many owners may not bring their vehicles for fitness tests presuming that the vehicles would fail the test. This might have resulted in the rise in the number of unfit vehicles, he said.

Asked if the BRTA mobile courts were taking action against such vehicles, Nur Mohammad said the courts were taking action.

Enforcement of relevant laws mostly depends on police and if they play their due role, owners would be bound to have their vehicles tested, he told this newspaper on Thursday.

About alleged hassle at the BRTA offices, he said they have made fitness tests hassle-free as the date for a test is fixed online and a vehicle can be tested at any BRTA office.

Regarding the big gap between the numbers of registered vehicles and driving licences, the BRTA

chief said many licence holders own more than one vehicles and so the gap would not be that big.

He denied the allegation of use of fake licences by a large number of drivers.

The BRTA chairman, however, admitted that they have been suffering from manpower crisis for a long time. He said they had asked for some 2,300 employees, but the authorities concerned approved only 96 and the recruitment of them was still under process.

Moreover, the organisation's 110 posts out of the total 823 remains vacant now, shows a document.

While WASA has reduced the system loss markedly, the bill is still high for city dwellers, according to Haque, the dean of the faculty of business and economics at the East West University.

In 2010, the system loss was about 40 percent. Now, it is down to 5 percent, the annual report shows.

"If Dhaka Wasa raise the tariffs and at the same time, it can restrict the overbilling, then people will not be impacted. So, my point is the service provider should ensure the pressurised WASA pipeline to reduce the excess billing," he added.

Khairuzzaman can't be deported: Malaysia HC

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Malaysian High Court yesterday barred the country's immigration department from deporting Mohamed Khairuzzaman, former Bangladeshi high commissioner to Malaysia.

Judge Mohamed Zaini Mazlan granted the order after holding a hearing of a habeas corpus plea, reported Free Malaysia Today.

Khairuzzaman was picked up by immigration authorities from his residence in Ampang on February 10.

The detention led to speculations in Dhaka about whether he could be investigated for his role in the killing of Bangladesh's four national leaders in jail in 1975.

DGHS plans to inoculate 1cr on Feb 26

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Directorate General of Health Services plans to inoculate one crore people with the first jab in a special vaccination campaign on February 26.

The government will reach its vaccination target for the first dose through the special campaign, said Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the DGHS.

"We would urge everyone to take the vaccine," he told a press briefing.

The government has inoculated around 10.06 crore people with the first dose as of Monday.

Meanwhile, the DGHS yesterday reported 34 deaths from Covid-19 and 4,746 new cases of the coronavirus.

SINHA MURDER

Pradeep, Liakat seek acquittal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Condemned convicts Pradeep Kumar Das and Liakat Ali yesterday filed three separate appeals with the High Court, seeking cancellation of their punishments and requesting acquittal.

The suspended police officers were convicted in the sensational murder case of Major (ret'd) Sinha Md Rashed Khan.

Pradeep and Liakat claimed in their appeal that they were innocent and the charges against them were faulty.

On January 31, Cox's Bazar District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Ismail sentenced Pradeep and Liakat to death and six others to life in prison.

Fortify Rights wants arms embargo on Myanmar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Fortify Rights has urged ASEAN to support the establishment of a UN Security Council-mandated global embargo on the sale of weapons and military technology to Myanmar.

The Myanmar military massacred civilians, used human shields, and committed other atrocities in Karenni State in acts that may amount to war crimes, said Fortify Rights in a report published yesterday.

At least 61 civilians in Karenni State were murdered by the Myanmar military, it said.

The call comes ahead of ASEAN foreign ministers' annual retreat today.