

Journo turned out to be a fugitive killer

Rab arrests man wanted for 17 years over wife's murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Rab team has arrested a journalist who they claim was sentenced to death for the murder of his wife in 2005.

According to Rab, the arrestee Ashraf Hossain alias Kamal, 47, went into hiding after killing his wife 17 years ago in Narayanganj.

He then started his career as a journalist and became a member of Ashulia Press Club hoping that the profession would keep him out of suspicion.

On Thursday, he was arrested from Savar, said Khandaker Al Moin, director (legal and media wing) of Rab.

The Rab official said Ashraf killed his wife Sanjida Akter at their Sonargaon residence in February 2005, two years after their marriage. He hanged the body from a ceiling fan and branded it a suicide.

An unnatural death case was filed in this regard, and police arrested him back then.

He, however, came out of jail after 12 days as Sanjida's father appealed for his bail, thinking about the fate of his 15-month-old grandchild.

Meanwhile, the autopsy report on Sanjida's body revealed that she was murdered by suffocation. As a result, Ashraf went into hiding and stopped communicating even with his family members in Noakhali.

A murder case was filed with Sonargaon Police Station in which he was awarded death in absentia in 2020.

Ashraf joined weekly Mahanagar Barta in 2006 as an assistant editor.

He became a member of the Ashulia Press Club in 2009 and later joined a newspaper named Sangbad Pratikshan.

He was elected as the organising secretary of Ashulia Press Club in the term of 2013-14.

He is currently a member of Ashulia Press Club and works as a staff reporter for Swadesh Bichitra, said the Rab official.



Two young book lovers discovering a world of wonders at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela at the Suhrawardy Udyan in the capital yesterday. The budding bibliophiles were browsing books at the Boi Mela's children's corner.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

UKRAINE-RUSSIA STANDOFF

Europe's security at risk

Says Germany; Moscow announces more troops withdrawal after US challenge; more shelling reported in eastern Ukraine

AGENCIES

Germany yesterday accused Russia of endangering Europe's security with demands that recall the Cold War, as Western leaders arrived for a Munich Security Conference set to be dominated by the Ukraine crisis.

Fears are growing in the West that Russia is on the verge of invading its neighbour, with the United States warning of a possible attack in the "coming days".

Ahead of the annual three-day conference's opening ceremony, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Moscow needed to show "serious steps towards de-escalation".

"With an unprecedented deployment of troops on the border with Ukraine and Cold War demands, Russia is challenging fundamental principles of the European peace order," Baerbock said in a statement.

Russian troops have all but encircled Ukraine during the Kremlin's stand-off with the West over Nato's expansion into eastern Europe.

Shellfire rang out in eastern Ukraine yesterday as the army and Moscow-backed separatists accused each other of provocations.

The Ukrainian joint command centre said the rebels had violated the ceasefire

20 times between midnight and 9:00 am yesterday, while the Donetsk and Lugansk separatist groups said the army had fired 27 times.

A separatist leader in eastern Ukraine announced the evacuation of his breakaway region's residents to southeast Russia after the increase in shelling.

All eyes were on Russian President Vladimir Putin's next move as Moscow announced he will oversee a weekend drill of "strategic forces" – ballistic and cruise missiles.

Russia said yesterday it was withdrawing more tanks and other armoured vehicles from areas near Ukraine's border.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the United Nations that Washington has intelligence showing that Moscow could order an invasion in the "coming days".

Russia has denied it has any such plan and claims to have begun withdrawing some of the 149,000 troops that Ukraine now says are on its borders, reports AFP.

But Putin has done nothing to dial down tensions, ordering the missile drills even as there are reports of an increase in shelling from Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine.

US President Joe Biden was set to hold

video talks with Western allies, including the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany and Nato, later yesterday to discuss the crisis.

Meanwhile, US ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said in a statement to an OSCE meeting on the Ukraine crisis yesterday that Russia's build-up of military personnel threatening Ukraine probably totals up to 190,000, reports Reuters.

"This is the most significant military mobilization in Europe since the Second World War," Michael Carpenter said.

Visiting Poland, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Washington was seeing "more" Russian forces moving into the Ukraine border region despite Moscow's announcements.

He announced the planned sale of 250 Abrams tanks to Poland.

The Netherlands plans to send military equipment to Ukraine, including rifles, ammunition, radar systems and mine-detecting robots, the government said yesterday.

"We continue to aim for a diplomatic solution", Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra said. "But at the same time Ukraine must be able to defend itself against a possible Russian attack."

Primary schools

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Education Minister Dipu Moni said the decision to reopen schools was taken following the recommendations of The National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 and directives from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Following a sharp rise in Covid-19 transmission, the government again shut down all schools and colleges for two weeks from January 21. The closure was later extended till February 21.

DAILY UPDATE

At least 2,584 new infections were recorded and 24 people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, read a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The current positivity rate is 9.31 percent while the total positivity rate

stands at 14.66 percent.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 28,931 and the mortality rate stands at 1.50 percent.

Meanwhile, the total number of cases rose to 1,929,154, added the release.

A total of 27,765 samples were tested across the country in the 24 hours.

At least 9,988 patients have recovered from Covid-19 during this period.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 1,737,854 and the recovery rate at 90.08 percent, added the release.

Of the 24 deceased, 17 were male and seven were female.

Of them, one was between 11-20, two were between 31-40, four between 41-50, two between 51-60 and 15 were above 60-years old, added the release.

Mali asks France to pull out troops 'without delay'

AFP, Bamako

Mali's army-led government yesterday asked France to withdraw its troops from the Sahel state "without delay", calling into question Paris' plans to pull out over several months.

A government spokesman added in a statement announced on public television that the results of France's nine-year military engagement in conflict-torn Mali were "not satisfactory".

On Thursday, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he was withdrawing troops from Mali after a breakdown in relations with the nation's ruling military junta.

Relations between the two countries deteriorated sharply after Mali's army seized power in a coup in 2020, and later defied calls to restore civilian rule swiftly.

The French pullout after nearly a decade is also set to see the smaller European Takuba force of special forces, created in 2020, leave Mali.

Whose side is ACC on?

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Instead of approving the filing of the cases, the ACC ordered reinvestigations into those allegations, without even showing any grounds, said Sharif's colleagues, wishing to remain unnamed.

Contacted, Jahurul Haque, commissioner (investigation) of ACC, said he could not instantly remember what prompted the graft watchdog to launch the reinvestigation.

He did not make any further comments.

On February 6 this year, Sharif was at his home in Chattogram. In the evening, he was stopped by some people in the basement of the building he lives in. They threatened that they would have him sacked if he did not withdraw cases against them. They also warned him of dire consequences.

He filed a general diary with Khulshi Police Station of the city, stating this.

He also wrote to the ACC seeking proper security. The ACC, however, sacked him 10 days later.

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SHARIF

The Daily Star has obtained

copies of the written complaints against Sharif.

Businessmen Md Idris, Belayet Hossen and lawyer Nurul Haque filed three separate complaints, alleging that Sharif threatened to frame them over land acquisition if he was not paid money.

They also alleged Sharif exercised power beyond his jurisdiction to impose "No Debit Orders" on their accounts without prior permission from the court.

He also tortured Md Idris in remand to glean information, according to one of the complaints.

In January, an ACC official investigating the allegations wrote to the authorities of the Chattogram Medical College Hospital, where Idris allegedly underwent treatment.

CMCH in a letter, signed by Medical Officer Md Momin Ullah Bhuiyan on January 29, informed the ACC that they did not find marks of any torture on Idris.

According to several reports published in The Daily Star in 2021, Idris, Nurul and Belayet led a land

acquisition syndicate which plundered public money by forging land documents and flexing muscles, depriving the landowners in Cox's Bazar.

Faking land documents and in collusion with land acquisition officials, the syndicate embezzled Tk 29 crore in 2020 alone, according to one of those reports.

Mahbubul Alam, the then deputy director of Chattogram ACC (Office-2), in his enquiry report on the complaints against Sharif, mentioned that "No Debit Orders" are imposed by courts at ACC's request.

"Sharif's actions regarding the 'No Debit Orders' did not go in line with ACC Rules," he said in his report.

Asked about the allegations, Sharif said he did not impose any order; rather he requested some banks to not allow withdrawal of money.

"I made the request to stop plundering of public money. I had no personal interest there," he told The Daily Star last night.

He said he did not torture Idris.

Belayet Hossen moved to the High Court after he allegedly failed to withdraw money from a private bank last year. The HC then said Sharif's request to the banks was illegal.

ACC also brought allegations against Sharif for keeping a seized amount of Tk 94 lakh under his possession.

Sharif claimed he handed over the amount to the ACC's office in Chattogram before joining office in Patuakhali.

"It is quite common to keep seized money in our office vaults," he said, adding his seniors were apprised of it. ACC Director in Chattogram Mahmud Hasan declined to comment on the matter.

Talking to reporters on Thursday, ACC Secretary Mahbub Hossain said Sharif was terminated for breaching service rules.

Sharif's colleagues, however, said he shouldn't have been terminated. "He could have been warned, his increments stopped, or he could have been demoted, but he did not deserve to be sacked," one of them told this correspondents.

Maj Gen Shakil new BGB chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed has been appointed as the new director general of Border Guard Bangladesh.

The public administration ministry yesterday issued a circular in this regard.

The current BGB DG Maj Gen Shafeenul Islam will return to the army, it added.

Prior to this, Maj Gen Shakil served as the director general of the Department of Immigration and Passports.



Man held for killing wife in a national park

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A man was arrested yesterday in a case filed in connection with the killing of his wife, whose body was found inside the Satchhari National Park in Habiganj's Chunarughat on Thursday.

The victim was Asma Akter, 25, and her fatherfiled a murder case against her husband Alamgir Mia, from Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar, on Thursday night.

Chunarughat police recovered Asma's body from a lemon orchard inside the park.

Quoting locals, police said Alamgir and his wife Asma arrived in Satchhari on Thursday morning in a CNG run auto-rickshaw. Locals later saw Asma's body in the park's lemon orchard.

Ali Ashraf, officer-in-charge of Chunarughat Police Station, said Asma married Alamgir around five years ago. They have a child.

Some injury marks were found around her neck, the OC said.

In primary interrogation, Alamgir admitted that he killed his wife over a family dispute, added the police official.

Man sent to jail over rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A Moulvibazar court yesterday sent a man to jail on charge of raping a 15-year-old girl in Moulvibazar's Kulaura.

The arrestee is Raju Das, 30, of the upazila.

According to police sources, Raju raped the girl in a paddy field on Monday. In fear, she could not tell anyone back home that day. She later shared the incident with her family members when she felt pain.

Police arrested Raju on Thursday night after the girl's guardian lodged a rape case with Kulaura Police Station.

Binoy Bhushan Roy, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the girl was sent to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital for medical tests.

E-gates at HSIA

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e-passport chips. This means, passengers will no longer be required to stand in queues for long, as the e-gates will open automatically for e-passport holders.

The government had launched the e-passport programme in January 2020 to make the immigration process easier and enhance the international ratings of Bangladesh's passports.

The e-passports add a layer of security to traditional non-electronic passports by embedding an electronic chip in the passport booklet that stores the biographical information visible on page 2 of the passport, as well as a digital security feature.

There is an embedded microprocessor chip that contains all information along with the photo, and data regarding fingerprint and iris of the eye of the passport holder, according to DIP.

In June 2019, e-gates were installed at the Dhaka airport as part of the government's move to launch e-passports. The immigration officials were given training on operating the gates.

Col Md Khalid Saifullah, additional project director of the e-passport project, told The Daily Star on February 2 that the immigration wing of the SB is supposed to operate the e-gate. But they are asking for a separate server link with all the information of e-passport details.

However, it does not mean that the link is necessary for e-gate operation, he added.

"Still, we already installed a separate server containing all necessary information about e-passports. It is now totally up to the Special Branch of police to make the e-gate functional."

Asked, Md Monirul Islam, deputy inspector general (Immigration) of SB, told The Daily Star that they need the sever link with e-passports to make the e-gate functional.

"We did not get any link from the Department of Immigration and Passports yet.

"Once the technical issues are solved and we get the link, the e-gates will be functional," he said.

Presently, the SB has a link with the Machine-Readable Passport (MRP) server, according to sources.

This server link is necessary to block or open any passport user's movement. In the absence of access or link with the server, there are possibilities that a person who has no authorisation to leave the country may pass through immigration.

For this reason, a link with the e-passport server is necessary for the e-gate, they added.

The government has planned to set up 50 e-gates gradually at all the airports and land ports across the country under the "E-Passport and Automated Border Control Management Project".