



## **Journalist Noor Ahmed Tortured and Forced to Stay Away from Profession by RAB in Sylhet**

*Fact-finding Report*

**Odhikar**

Noor Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, the editor of the daily newspaper Doinik Sylhet Protidin and also the General Secretary of the Sylhet Press Club, alleged that on April 7, 2007, several officers of RAB 9 arrested him and subjected him to severe torture after which he was handed over to the police following the filing of an extortion case. Though seriously injured Noor was released on bail on September 3, 2007, he could not so far return to his profession due to threats from RAB.

After receiving information from the concerned officials of the Sylhet Press Club at the first week of September 2008, Odhikar conducted a fact-finding mission about the incident between 7 and 9 September, 2008. During the fact-finding, Odhikar spoke with:

- The tortured person
- Witnesses to the arrest torture
- The plaintiff of the concerned extortion case
- The concerned law enforcement agencies

### **Noor Ahmed (41), 67/A Pallabi Residential Area, West Pathantula, Sylhet**

Noor Ahmed told Odhikar that on April 7, 2007, he was working at the office of the daily newspaper, Doinik Sylhet Protidin on the first floor of Kaniz Plaza, Zindabazar. At around 9.00 pm he was informed from the reception that an officer from RAB 9 was waiting at the gate to meet him. After coming down 10 minutes later, he saw Captain Mustafiz and Captain Al Amin, both of whom he knew from before. The two Captains were accompanied by 6/7 other men in civilian clothes and they all came in a white microbus. Captain Mustafiz told Noor that he wanted to speak to him and to come with him to the RAB office. Noor did not want to go to the RAB office without any distinct reason but was forced into the microbus. Once he was put into the microbus his vest was taken off and it was used to blindfold him. Noor was also handcuffed. After about 30 minutes, the vehicle stopped and Noor was taken in a room.

Noor said that he was tortured on several occasions. Initially he was beaten with a stick from the bottom of his feet up to his knees. After beating him for 15/20 minutes, Noor was asked in which places he was involved in extortion. When Noor told them that he was not involved in any extortion anywhere, he was again beaten. At one point Noor was hung on a ring and then beaten. He went on to say that the RAB officers beat him using various techniques.

At around 3.00 am Noor was made to walk up and down the first and second floors four to five times in his blindfolds. His cuffs were however taken off then. Noor's legs swelled up and he could not walk. His blindfolds were opened for two to three minutes in a room at one point. It was during that time that he saw Captain Mustafiz and Commanding Officer Ferdous sitting on two chairs. They again mentioned several extortion cases and asked Noor about his involvement in those cases. Since Noor failed to say anything regarding those cases, he was again blindfolded and beaten and at one point during the beatings, his toes got broken.

<sup>1</sup> According to him, his name was Noor Ahmed. However, he was popularly known as Ahmed Noor.

Journalist Noor stated that on April 8, 2007, he was taken to another small room where the RAB officers took off his blindfolds. At around 8.00 am he was taken to another room in blindfolds. In that room he saw Captain Mustafiz and Captain Al Amin sitting on chairs, after his blindfolds were taken off. They allowed Noor to sit on a chair. They interrogated him on various issues. They then told him to write down all he had stated during the night long interrogation on a piece of paper. Following their instructions, Noor then wrote about his source of earnings and about his newspaper on a white piece of paper.

In a state of blindfolds Noor was taken to another room at around 10.00 am. He was extremely tired because he by then had to endure many forms of physical and psychological torture all night long.

At around 2.00 pm he was told to give his signature on a piece of paper with things written on it. He was not then in a condition to read what was in fact written on that paper.

Noor stated that before filing the extortion case against him the RAB handed over him to the Kotoali Police Station at around 11.00 pm. During the trial he had to attend hearings in a state of illness. Although there was a court order directing treatment to his legs, the jail authorities sent Noor for treatment to the Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital after a delay of 45 days, without any apparent reason.

He stated that even long after the incident he still have pain in his feet, ankles and knees. He has also been suffering from respiratory problems since his release on bail. He continued by saying that he was unable to have proper medical treatment for want of money.

Noor stated that following his arrest on April 7, 2007, Jamal Uddin, a Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) of RAB 9, filed another false case against him on April 15, 2007. The court acquitted Noor from the first case that was filed against him and in the second case filed by DAD Jamal Uddin, he received bail on September 3, 2007.

He felt that he was arrested for his reporting on illegal activities by RAB and the involvement of the Deputy Inspector General (DIG<sup>2</sup>) of police of Sylhet, Shahidullah regarding taking bribes. He further stated that RAB wanted to set his arrest as an example for other media so that they get intimidated to publish factual reports against the illegal activities of RAB. While Noor was in jail the RAB 9 authorities had repeatedly asked Doinik Sylhet Protidin to stop their publications. On one such day while he was in jail, the Advisory Editor of Doinik Sylhet Protidin visited him in the jail and told him that after Odhikar's May 14, 2007 report stating '89 killed by law enforcement agencies in four months' was published in Doinik Sylhet Protidin on May 15, 2007, Captain Mustafiz and Captain Al Amin came and gave a verbal order to shut down the publication of the newspaper.

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<sup>2</sup> Deputy Inspector General of police (DIG) is the head police administration of a Division in Bangladesh, who has jurisdiction over all the Districts under the concerned Division.

**Sajol Daash (52), the Chief of the Sylhet Bureau of the Daily Newspaper Doinik Khabor, Common Market, Bondor Bazaar, Sylhet**

Sajol Daash stated that at around 9.00 am on April 7, 2007, he went to his newspaper office. At 11.00 am Captain Mustafiz and Captain Al Amin, both of whom he knew from before came to his office accompanied by 7/8 men in civilian clothes. Captain Mustafiz called him to his office and there handed over Sajol a yellow envelope and told him to keep it in his pocket. When Sajol refused, Captain Mustafiz forced the envelope in his pocket and then handcuffed him. Before Sajol could figure out what was going on, the RAB officers called people from the street and took out the yellow envelope containing money from Sajol's pocket and showed it to them. Sajol was then arrested and taken to the office of RAB 9.

Sajol stated that after being taken there, the RAB officers tied his hands onto a ring and hung him. He was beaten in that state for 30 minutes after which he was taken to another room and interrogated for his involvement in extortion and other cases. When Sajol refused to admit that he was involved in extortion he was taken to another room and beaten in a state of blindfolds after which he was told to give a confessional statement about his involvement in extortion. He was also told to confess to the involvement of Noor Ahmed, the Secretary of the Sylhet Press Club and Apurbo Sharma regarding their involvement in extortion related cases. Sajol was intimidated by being told that if he did not give the confessional statement in the way he had been directed to he would be beaten up again. Afterwards, at around 11.00 pm, Sajol was made to stand beside a table on which arms were kept. Photographs were taken of this.

Sajol went on to say that at around 11.30 pm, he was taken to another room where RAB officers were using a drilling machine to push holes into a man's feet and take off the hand nails of another man. Noor was hung on a ring and beaten in that room.

Sajol stated that at around 3.30 am on April 8, 2007, he was given electric shocks on the head by the RAB officers. He said his left leg had been paralyzed due to the beatings. Sajol saw Apurba on his side. At around 7.00 am, he was taken to Magistrate Abdul Hye where he was intimidated and forced to give a false confessional statement. An extortion case was filed against Sajol and after that he was handed over to the Kotoali Police Station.

**Apurbo Sharma (27), News Editor of the Daily Newspaper Doinik Jugveri, Sylhet**

Apurbo Sharma stated that at around 8.00 pm on April 7, 2007, he was informed from his office that a RAB 9 Officer was searching for him. On reaching his office at 8.30 pm, Apurbo saw Captain Mustafiz of RAB 9 and 7/8 men in civilian clothes, standing at the gate of his office beside a car. After entering the office Captain Mustafiz said 'I have to talk with you' and drew him to the car. Apurbo was then taken to a RAB office where he was inhumanly tortured by Captain Mustafiz. Apurbo refused to give the details of what had happened.

**Iqbal Siddiqui, Advisory Editor, Doinik Sylhet Protidin, Former President of Sylhet Press Club**

Iqbal Siddiqui told Odhikar that he was working as usual at his office on April 7, 2007. At around 8.30 pm, a group of RAB officers came and arrested Noor and left taking him. When Iqbal went ahead towards them, the RAB officers pushed him aside and did

not provide any reason for arresting Noor. He recalled that Noor's vest was used to blindfold him.

On April 8, 2007, when Iqbal went to the Kotoali Police Station to inquire about Noor, he was told that the RAB had not transferred anyone called Noor Ahmed to them. Iqbal came to know on April 9, 2007, that an extortion case had been filed against Noor and that he had been sent to jail custody. When he went to visit Noor in the jail, he saw that Noor's feet fingers were broken due to the beatings he received from the RAB officers.

**Muktabis-Un-Noor, President, Sylhet Press Club and President of the Daily Newspaper Doinik Jalalabad, Sylhet**

Muktabis-Un-Noor said that on April 7, 2007 at around 10.00 pm, he came to know from other journalists that Noor had been taken away to the camp by RAB officers for interrogation. On the condition that their names would not be disclosed, many others told him that Sajol was arrested on the allegation of being involved in extortion and that on the basis of the confessional statement given by Sajol, the news editor of the daily Doinik Jugveri was also arrested by RAB.

On April 8, 2007, he contacted the RAB office and came to know that more journalists may be arrested. He then contacted the Director General (DG) of RAB and the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Sylhet regarding arrest of Noor. He was informed that according to the confessional statement of Sajol, an extortion case was filed at the Kotoali Police Station and Noor was also an accused in that case. Later on, when that case proved false, Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Jamal Uddin filed another case against Noor on April 15, 2007. Noor was held in custody under that case. Muktabis-Un-Noor told that Captain Mustafiz and Ferdous, the Commanding Officer of RAB 9, verbally conveyed to him to ensure that Noor would not return the Press Club as General Secretary. The RAB officers also threatened that if Noor returned to journalism, several cases would be filed against him to have him confined in jail. This was why he did not reinstate Noor as General Secretary.

**Md. Aftab Uddin, Acting General Secretary, Sylhet Press Club, Sylhet**

Md. Aftab Uddin said that although Sajol and Apurbo did have a reputation of being involved in extortion, Noor was well-known for his honour and integrity as a journalist.

Aftab stated that on August 9, 2007, a letter numbered 254 came to the Press Club from the office of the Anti Corruption Commission which stated that Noor worked as a journalist while he was employed as a Health Assistant at the Upazila Hospital. For this actions could be taken against Noor for his corruption. Aftab went on to say that it was obvious that the letter was sent intentionally though the Press Club did not have the legal authority to take any legal steps against any journalist.

He commented that Noor was arrested and tortured in a planned manner since he reported unfair acts committed by RAB and police officers. He also said that Captain Mustafiz told him not to reinstate Noor as the General Secretary of the Sylhet Press Club.

**Md. Anwarul Haque (55), Kalairag, Companyganj, Sylhet**

Md. Anwarul Haque told Odhikar that he was a stone trader. He said that Sajal, the Sylhet bureau chief of the daily newspaper Doinik Khabor and Hakim, another

journalist, published a false report regarding him on January 26, 2007. According to Anwarul, when he contacted the two journalists to talk about the matter on February 20, 2008, they demanded Taka 100,000.00 as extortion. They also threatened him saying that they would publish more false reports regarding the stone trade of Anwarul and his business partner, Faizur Rahman. He said that he gave them the demanded amount to stop false reporting.

When Sajal and Hakim threatened them in the same way, he gave them Taka 17,000.00 more.

Anwarul said that at around 10.00 am on April 6, 2007, Sajal again demanded Taka 50,000.00 and threatened him saying that if he would refuse to give the money, Sajal would publish a report where he would brand him as a Shorbohara<sup>3</sup> member. Under those circumstances, he said, he informed his nephew, Wahid Talukdar, who was a Colonel of the Bangladesh Army, posted at Jessore Cantonment. He said that Wahid phoned RAB 9 in Sylhet and told them to enquire into the matter and take necessary actions immediately. He then contacted RAB 9 and, following the instructions given by Ferdous, the Commanding Officer of RAB 9, phoned Sajal and Hakim and told them that he was ready to give them Taka 10,000.00

He said that at around 9.30 am on April 7, 2007, he went to the office of RAB 9 with 20 five-hundred taka notes. The RAB officers photocopied the notes and got them attested by Devjit Singh, a First Class Magistrate. As instructed by the RAB officers, he went to give the money to Sajal and Hakim at the Sylhet office of Doinik Khabor at Bondor Bazaar. After he came out of the Doinik Khabor office, the RAB officers in civilian clothes laid in wait for Sajal and Hakim. He said that Hakim managed to flee, sensing the presence of the RAB officers. However, the RAB officers caught Sajal red handed with the notes Anwarul gave to them. Anwarul said Sub-Inspector (SI) Nazrul, a RAB officer, searched Sajal's body and found Taka 10,000.00 and the notes matched with the attested photocopies of the notes. He said he filed a case regarding the incident with the Kotoali Police Station against Sajal and Hakim on April 8, 2007. He further stated that neither Noor nor Apurbo demanded any money as extortion from him.

#### **Mahsinul Haque Kabir, Deputy Director, RAB 9, Sylhet**

During his conversation with Odhikar, Mahsinul Haque Kabir said Sajal was arrested on charges of extortion and following his confession, Apurbo Sharma and Noor Ahmed were later arrested. He said that the court acquitted Noor from the charge. However, Apurbo and Sajal were sentenced to two years' imprisonment. The RAB officer said that Jamal Uddin, a Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) of RAB 9, filed a case against Noor on April 15, 2007, for cheating, extortion and working with a newspaper, a daily newspaper when he was engaged as a public servant. He said that the case was filed under sections 168/420/385 of the Penal Code and was numbered 62. He claimed that Noor was not tortured during interrogation.

**-The End of Report-**

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<sup>3</sup> Shorbohara is a radical left party in Bangladesh, which operates underground.