



Four journalists allegedly beaten while collecting information in Kumarkhali at Kushtia

Fact-finding report
Odhikar

After receiving allegations that low quality materials were being used by the contracting firm GM Enterprise which was given the responsibility to renovate Kuthibari , a famous house of noble laureate and Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, on June 03, 2011 Mohammad Touhidi Hasan Shiplu (26) Kushtia district correspondent of the national daily newspaper Prothom Alo, Hasan Belal (33), Kushtia district correspondence of RTV channel, Mohammad Johurul Islam (30) Kushtia district correspondent of Ekushey TV channel, and Sajeeb Ahmed Khan (25), cameraman of the same channel went to the Kuthibari area to collect information. However, it is alleged that these journalists were severely beaten up by Ali Hossain, the local contractor of GM

Odhikar conducted a fact-finding mission on this incident. During the fact finding Odhikar interviewed-

- The assaulted journalists
- Eye witness
- The alleged contractor, Ali Hossain
- Affiliated members of law enforcement agencies.

Hasan Belal (33), RTV District Correspondent

Hasan Belal informed Odhikar that on June 02, 2011 a complaint letter came to him from Shilaidoho under Kumarkhali upazila of Kushtia District. In the letter some local people informed and requested him to report about the poor quality of materials used for the renovation of the compound of Kuthibari. He informed this matter to the head office of RTV at Dhaka. RTV gave him an assignment and told him to inquire about it. On June 03, 2011 at about 11.30 am he along with journalist Mohammad Johurul Islam, cameraman Sajeeb Ahmed Khan and journalist Tauhidi Hasan Shiplu reached Kuthibari. There came Kumarkhali correspondent of Bhorer Kagoj , Habib Chowhan. They met with the custodian of Kuthibari, Mohammad Mohidul Islam and wanted to know about the allegation. Custodian Mohammad Mohidul Islam informed him that he would not be able to give any information, but told him to contact the Deputy Assistant Engineer Zillur Rahman of the Archaeological Department based at Khulna, who has been given the responsibility to oversee this work. Then four of them came out from the

room of the custodian and looked for Zillur Rahman. Realising the presence of the journalists, Zillur Rahman left the place to avoid them. The journalists started taking pictures of the materials being used for renovation work. Suddenly 13/14 people on 6/7 motorbikes came to the spot and some workers also joined them, altogether about 25/30 people came to attack them. Belal tried to resist the leader of the gang Ali Hossain, the Cultural Secretary of Awami League Kushtia town unit and the contractor for this renovation work. However, they did not pay any heed to his words and snatched his camera, threw it on the road and started beating Mohammad Zohurul Islam, the local correspondent of Ekushey TV. They also snatched the camera of Sajeeb Ahmed Khan, the cameraman of Ekushey TV and broke that by throwing it on the road. They beaten Sajeeb so badly that he became unconscious and fell on the ground. During this time, due to the fear of these miscreants the local people did not come forward to save them. He informed the matter to RTV Dhaka office and also the local police. After an hour Officer in Charge of Kumarkhali Police Station arrived there and rescued them. Police first took them to the Kumarkhali Health Complex for first aid and later took them to the Kushtia General Hospital for better treatment.

Mohammad Zohurul Islam(30), Local Correspondent of Ekushey TV

Mohammad Zohurul Islam informed Odhikar that on June 02, 2011 Ekushey TV gave him an assignment to inquire about the allegations of corruption in renovating the Kuthibari home of Rabindranath Tagore. On June 03, 2011 at about 10.30 am, along with cameraman Sajeeb Ahmed Khan, Mohammad Touhidi Hasan Shiplu, Kushtia District Correspondent of daily newspaper Prothom Alo, Hasan Belal, Kushtia District Correspondent of RTV he reached the Kuthibari of Rabindranath Tagore. After talking with the custodian, Mohammad Mohidul Islam, they searched for Deputy Assistant Engineer Zillur Rahman. They told Sajeeb, the cameraman, to take footage of the materials which were being used for the renovation of Kuthibari. When Sajeeb was taking footage, fifteen people with 6/7 motorbikes arrived, led by Ali Hossain, the Cultural Affairs Secretary of Awami League of Kushtia town unit. Along with those fifteen people, some 14/15 labourers also joined in and attacked them. The worker, Nizam Uddin, along with his people attacked them with sticks, hockey sticks, iron rods, hammers, crowbars and other tools. The miscreants attacked the cameraman, Sajeeb and broke his camera. Sajeeb became unconscious after the beating. The miscreants confined them. After an hour Officer in Charge Sheikh Atiar Rahman of Kumarkhali Police Station along with some police personnel reached the spot and rescued them.

Police admitted them to the Kumarkhali Health Complex for treatment. With the help of police he filed a case as a complainant at the Kumarkhali Police Station under sections 143/148/149/323/324/325/326/307/379/427/114 of the Penal Code. The number of the case was 04, dated 03/06/2011. Later he was shifted to the Kushtia General Hospital at 7.00 pm on the same day.

Mohammad Touhidi Hasan Shiplu (26), Kushtia District Correspondent, Daily Prothom Alo-

Mohammad Touhidi Hasan Shiplu informed Odhikar that on June 03, 2011 at about 11.30 am they reached the Shilaidaho Kuthibari. On a written complaint by the local people, they started taking photos of the low quality materials. During this time at about 12 pm suddenly 25 /30 people led by the contractor and Cultural Affairs Secretary of the local Awami League Ali Hossain attacked them. Sensing the situation, they ran away from that place and entered the Robindro Sangsod adjacent to the main gate of the property. Kamal Hossain of the Robindro Sangsod locked them from outside in order to protect them, after knowing their identity. Shiplu and another journalist Habib Chowhan hid themselves in the room. However, after five minutes the attackers broke the northern door of the room and dragged them out from there. Then Ali Hossain and his accomplices beat them up severely. Police was informed and they came after an hour and rescued them and admitted them to the Kushtia District Hospital after first aid at the local health complex. A case was filed at the Kumarkhali Police Station. He demanded the arrest of Ali Hossain, the prime accused in this incident.

Kamal Hossain (44), Eye Witness

Kamal Hossain informed Odhikar that he was an Education Programmer of the Robindro Songsod. On June 03, 2011 at about 11.30 am he was working in his office. Suddenly two people who looked very scared came to him, introduced themselves as journalists; and informed him that they came to collect news, but people belonging to the contractor were looking for them. They sought shelter from him. He helped them hide themselves beside book shelves and came out from the room, locked the door from outside and sat at a tea stall to observe the situation. Within five minutes, the contractor of the construction works and the Cultural Affairs Secretary of the local Awami League Ali Hossain , construction worker Nizam Uddin along with 15/20 people came up to him and pressed him to open the lock of the Robindro Songsad. When he refused to open the door and said that he did not have the key, the attackers broke the back door of Robindro Songsod, entered it and dragged out correspondent of the daily Prothom Alo Touhidi Hasan Shiplu and beat him up by sticks, hammers and iron rods. As the situation became uncontrollable, the residents of Kuthibari area and local shopkeepers tried to resist the attackers, but they were threatened. At about 12.00 pm Officer in Charge of Kumarkhali Police Station with his force reached the spot and recovered the severely injured and confined journalists.

Mohammad Mohidul Islam, Custodian, Archaeological Department, Kushtia

Mohammad Mohidul Islam informed Odhikar that on June 03, 2011 at about 11.30 am, Touhidi Hasan Shiplu of daily Prothom Alo, Mohammad Zohurul Islam, journalist of daily Ekushey TV, Hasan Belal, journalist of RTV and Sajeeb, cameraman of RTV came to his office to inquire about the construction work at Kuthibari. He requested him to contact Zillur Rahman, Deputy Assistant Engineer of the Archaeological Department of Khulna who was supervising the work. Later he came to know that the workers of the

construction site beat them up. At about 12.15 pm Sheikh Atiar Rahman of Kumarkhali Police Station came to him along with injured journalists and talked with him about the incident and went away with the injured journalists.

Zillur Rahman, Deputy Assistant Engineer, Archeological Department, Khulna

Zillur Rahman informed Odhikar that he was responsible for supervising construction work on the Kuthibari. He refused to talk about the beating of journalists at the Kuthibari area on June 03, 2011.

Ali Hossain (45), local contractor, GM Enterprise and Cultural Affairs Secretary of Awami League of Kushtia town unit and the prime accused

Ali Hossain informed Odhikar that he is the Cultural Affairs Secretary of Kushtia town unit of Awami League. He was awarded the contract to renovate the Kuthibari of Rabindranath Tagore at Shilaidaho. He said on June 03, 2011 he was busy with the Union Parishad Election at his union. At about 11.15 am his chief worker, Nizam Uddin, informed him through mobile phone that 4/5 journalists from Kushtia had come to the spot, were taking pictures and told Nizam Uddin to stop the work. After hearing this he and some people rushed to the spot. There he found the journalists were locked in quarrel with his workers. His people also became angry with the journalists and engaged in a scuffle. He said he tried to stop the fight.

Sheikh Atiar Rahman, Officer in Charge, Kumarkhali Police Station, Kushtia

Sheikh Atiar Rahman informed Odhikar that on June 03, 2011 at about 11.30 am a person called him through mobile phone and informed him that miscreants attacked four journalists at Kuthibari. He along with some other policemen reached the spot at about 12.00pm. There he found some people were pouring water on the head of one person. He rescued Hasan, Johurul, Belal and Sajeeb from there. He admitted these three journalists to the Kumarkhali Health Complex for first aid. Zohurul being the complainant filed a case under sections 143/148/149/323/324/325/326/307/379/427/114 of the Penal Code. The case numbered 04, dated 03.06.2011.

Sub Inspector Jahiruddin, Investigation Officer, Kumarkhali Police Station, Kushtia

SI Zahiruddin informed Odhikar that he was investigating the case filed by Zohurul. In this case Ali Hossain, Nizam Uddin, Mohammad Saheen and 20/25 people unnamed people have been accused. Among them Nizam Uddin was arrested and sent to the Jail.

Sub Inspector (SI) Mohammad Alim, Detective Branch, Kushtia

Sub Inspector Mohammad Alim informed Odhikar on August 27, 2011 that a case which was filed by Zohurul Islam had been transferred to the Detective Branch (DB). He is the investigating officer of the case. He informed that accused Ali Hossain and Mohammad Selim are under interim bail from the High Court Division and Nizam Uddin was sent to the jail after being arrested.

Odhikar expresses its concern about the attack on the journalists by the supporters of the Awami League. Odhikar demands punitive action against the perpetrato

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