

Tapan and Rikta from Jhenaidah Allegedly Killed by RAB in Kushtia

Fact-finding Report
Odhikar

On June 18, 2008, in the village of Baradi, Kushtia Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Tapan alias Dada Tapan (48) from west Bishoykhali village under the Sadar Upazila¹ of Jhenaidah district and Nasima Akhtar Rikta (18) from the village of Bepari Para under the same Upazila were shot to death by RAB. This allegation was made by an witness to the shooting.

Odhikar conducted a fact-finding mission into the incident. During the fact-finding, Odhikar spoke with:

- The family and relatives of the deceased
- Witness
- Neighbours
- Doctor and
- The concerned police and RAB.

Ibadat Hossain Malitha (75), Father of Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Tapan, West Bishoykhali, Jhenaidah district

Ibadat Hossain Malitha told Odhikar that Abdur Rashid Malitha (48) was the eldest of his 6 children. He stated that after Rashid passed his higher secondary level of education he began to work for an NGO known as the “Gono Shahajjo Shongstha” in Khulna. Rashid joined the Purba Banglar Communist Party in 1988. Despite a lot of effort, Rashid could not be brought away from politics. At a certain point he began to live in Kushtia. In 1996, he attained membership of the Party’s highest forum, i.e. the membership in the Politburo. On January 25, 2000 when he was elected the regional head of the Party at Khulna, the name given to him by his Party, ‘Tapan’ was incorporated into his real name. Later on he came to be known as ‘Dada Tapan’. Tapan’s father went on to say that on June 14, 2002, Tapan formed a new organisation called Purba Banglar Communist Party-ML Janajuddha. He told Odhikar that on the morning of June 18, 2008, he heard from various other people that Tapan had been killed by RAB. His fears were confirmed by a broadcast on the 8 o’ clock television news. At 6.00 pm, Ibadat’s son-in-law, Selim brought Tapan’s body home under the guard of four/five vehicles carrying RAB officers and police officers. There were signs of 6 bullet wounds on Tapan’s body. At around 11.00 pm, the RAB and the police buried Tapan’s body in a hurry and left.

Aleya Begum (45), Rikta’s Mother, Ashostholi Village, Jhenaidah District

Aleya Begum told Odhikar that she owned two houses. One of the houses was located in the village of Ashostholi and the other was in the Bepari Para of Jhenaidah. She had two daughters and one son. Nasima Akhtar Rikta was the youngest amongst her children. Rikta was prone to asthma which was why she had to take medication regularly. After studying up to Class 10, Rikta assumed responsibilities over the family. Rikta would purchase *saris*² and three-pieces³ from Kushtia and sell them at Jhenaidah after doing

¹ Upazila is an administrative unit under a district in Bangladesh.

² A long piece of cloth that is wrapped around the body and worn as the main piece of clothing by women in South Asia

embroidery work on them. She would often stay at Kushtia for business purposes. From a month prior to her death Rikta had taken tenancy at a boarding house along with two other girls with the objective to further learn the art of embroidery. During that month Rikta would come home two or three days a week. Rikta's mother stated that she came home for the last time on June 16, 2008 and returned to Kushtia that very day. On June 18, 2008 when Aleya Begum saw the news of her daughter's death on television, she informed her elder daughter's husband Asaduzzaman. Asaduzzaman went to Kushtia to find Rikta's body in the custody of RAB and was confirmed that Rikta had been shot by RAB. At around 6.00 pm, Asaduzzaman brought home Rikta's body under the escort of the RAB and the police. There were bullet wounds on Rikta's head and leg. Aleya Begum demanded that her daughter was a craftswoman and was not in any way involved in criminal activities. She went on to say that there were no cases against Rikta nor were any General Diaries (GDs) filed against her at any police station. Aleya Begum said that if her daughter had been involved in crime, she could have been tried but the RAB officers had killed her. Aleya Begum demanded from the Government justice for her daughter's death.

Golam Hossain Akash, Brother of Tapan and Witness to the Incident

Odhikar tried to speak with Golam Hossain Akash (35) when he was in the custody of the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate of Kushtia. He passed his statements to Odhikar through Jafar, the Inspector of Police of the court. Akash said that after the establishment of the Purba Banglar Communist Party-ML Janajuddha, his brother Tapan involved him in the activities of the party. Tapan would keep ammunition, bullets and political books in Akash's house. At around 2.00 am on June 18, 2008, Akash heard someone at the door of his house. Just as he opened the door, RAB officers held a gun to his head and handcuffed him and kicked him on his hip to force him to fall to the ground. RAB officers used their gun barrels to hit Akash on his ribs and broke his left leg by trampling on it. After being questioned on other issues Akash was asked about the whereabouts of 'Dada Tapan'. At around 4.00 am, RAB took Akash along with them to Tapan's house. Upon entering Tapan's house some of the RAB officers grabbed hold of him while others directly fired at him to kill him. Rikta was at Tapan's house during that time. Golam Hossain Akash went on to say that the RAB officers killed Rikta by shooting her in her head and feet. After severely beating up Akash, the RAB officers brought him back home at around 7.00 am.

- Golam Hossain Akash was killed in 'crossfire' on the third day of his 8-day remand (June 26, 2008) while in the custody of RAB-12.

Azmeri Ferdousi Akhi (24), Wife of Golam Hossain Akash

Resident of Udibari, Kushtia and wife of Tapan's younger brother, Azmeri Ferdousi Akhi told Odhikar that at around 2.00 am on June 18, 2008, she was awakened from sleep by banging on the gate of her house. She said her husband Akash opened the door to a team of RAB officers who tied up his hands from the back. Her house was soon filled with a large number of RAB officers. The RAB officers took Akash into another room and began to beat him and ask him where Tapan was and where the ammunition and explosives were kept. In such a situation Akash handed over 1500 bullets, one pistol, around 5000 monthly bulletins of the Purba Banglar Communist Party-ML Janajuddha, political books, a computer, a fax machine and a printer. At around 4.00 pm, a team of RAB officers took

³ The three pieces of cloth that make up the 'Salwar-Kameez' suit of tunic, pants and scarf worn by women in South Asia

him away in search of Tapan while another team remained at her house. The team which had gone out with Azmeri's husband returned at around 7.00 am in the morning. Azmeri's husband Akash was in a severely bad shape because of the beatings he had received from RAB on his forehead, arms and fingers which were bloody. Akash's right leg was broken and blood was dripping from his right wrist. When Azmeri took her husband who was in handcuffs to the lavatory, she saw blood dripping from his penis as well. Akash screamed in pain while he urinated. He informed her that the RAB officers had taken him to his brother Tapan's house and had shot and killed Tapan and Rikta from point blank range. Azmeri informed that after seizing all their belongings in the house the RAB officers left with her husband against whom there was no case in any police station. Akash was a pigeon trader. However, Akash did keep Tapan's ammunition, bullets and political books in his house.

Maleka Banu (30), Tapan's Neighbour

Maleka Banu told Odhikar that she was awakened by the loud noise of firing from her neighbouring house at around 4.45 am on June 18, 2008. She stepped out of her house to see a slight drizzle and numerous RAB officers positioned around Tapan's house. When she tried to go towards Tapan's house, she was barred by the RAB officers. Later on at around 11.00 am Maleka Banu saw Tapan and Rikta's bodies being carried away on a rickshaw-van⁴.

Ansar Ali, Graam Police⁵, Baradi, Sadar Upazila, Kushtia

A resident of the village of Baradi, Ansar Ali told Odhikar that at around 7.30 am on June 18, 2008, he went inside Tapan's house with a group of five police officers led by the Officer-in-Charge of the Kushtia Sadar Police Station. He saw six bullet wounds spread across Tapan's chest and left arm. Rikta's body was lying just beside that of Tapan's. It seemed to Ansar Ali that Rikta was engaged in a scuffle prior to her death. Rikta's skull and the left portion of her face were separated. SI Monir from the Police Station prepared the inquest report of the bodies at around 8.00 am. At around 10.00 am SI Monir took the bodies to the Kushtia Sadar Hospital under the supervision and guard of RAB.

Momena (50), the person who had washed Rikta's body for burial

Momena told Odhikar that while washing the body for burial, she saw the right side of Rikta's skull blown off. Rikta's brain was exposed and a bullet had pierced through her left leg.

Shirina (18), Rikta's friend

Shirina told Odhikar that Rikta and she studied in the same school. When in Class 10, Rikta was forced to discontinue her studies and take charge of the family. She stated that Rikta would buy saris and three-pieces from Kushtia and after embroidering them, would offer them for sale at Jhenaidah. As Shirina described the state of Rikta's body, she said that half of Rikta's head was gone. She demanded proper investigation into the incident.

⁴ A small and light, pedaled vehicles with three wheels used to carry passengers and goods.

⁵ A Graam Police works under the Union Parishad (a form of local government in Bangladesh), who assists the Parishad and law enforcement agencies in law enforcement activities.

Abdus Samad, the Doctor Who Performed the Post-mortem of the Bodies

Doctor Abdus Samad told Odhikar that on June 18, 2008, he performed the post-mortem of Tapan and Rikta's bodies. There were 6 bullet wounds on Tapan's chest and ribs. Rikta's skull was blown away by the gunshot and there was also a bullet wound on her left foot.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Monir Hossain, Person Who Prepared the Inquest Report of the Bodies, Kushtia Sadar Police Station

Monir Hossain told Odhikar that on the morning of June 18, 2008, he prepared the Inquest report of the bodies in the presence of a Magistrate. He stated that the bottom of Rikta's left foot had been shot at and her skull was blown off because the right side of it was shot at.

Monir stated that there were 6 bullet wounds on Tapan's body including his legs and chest. There were 53 cases at various police stations filed against Tapan.

Md. Babul Uddin Sardar, Officer-in-Charge (OC), Kushtia Sadar Police Station

The Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the Kushtia Sadar Police Station, Md. Babul Uddin Sardar told Odhikar that at around 6.00 am on June 18, 2008, he was informed by RAB-12 that the Janajuddha leader 'Dada Tapan' and Nasima Akhtar Rikta who was at his house were killed in 'crossfire'. OC Babul then took his force to the place of incident. It was under his order that Sub-Inspector (SI) Monir prepared the inquest report of the bodies. While talking with Odhikar, OC Babul said that if in the process of killing a top terrorist, 10 innocent people were killed, then there was nothing to be done on their part to avoid the innocent killings.

Captain Mahmud, Crime Prevention Company-1, RAB-12

Captain Mahmud told Odhikar that many people have been killed, there have been numerous muggings and robberies under the name of the Purba Banglar Communist Party. He said it was interesting to note that after killing someone, the the murderers claim to be the members of Purba Banglar Communist Party and conveyed to others that they had in fact done the killing, by issuing posters and leaflets. However, the law enforcement agencies had been unable to catch them for a long time. Finally, it was the RAB that unearthed the hub of Janajuddha. According to RAB sources, the name of Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Tapan alias 'Dada Tapan', son of Ibadat Hossain Malitha from West Bishoykhali, Jhenaidah, came up as the founder of the Purba Banglar Communist Party-ML Janajuddha. RAB conducted various raids to catch Tapan but failed. On June 18, 2008, about 60 RAB officers from RAB-6 and RAB-12 conducted a raid at the village of Udibari and at around 2.00 am they arrested Tapan's brother Golam Hossain Akash. According to information received from Akash, RAB conducted a raid in the neighbouring village of Baradi to finally find Tapan. Captain Mahmud stated that at around 3.45 am, when the RAB officers tried to enter Tapan's house, Tapan opened fire upon the RAB from inside. The RAB officers also opened fire and as they fired on they entered the house. As they were about to arrest Tapan, they found him dead. There was a girl called Nasima Akhtar Rikta with Tapan then. She was also killed during the firing. The RAB officer stated that there was no case or any allegations against Rikta. He also stated that if in the process of killing Tapan, 10 other innocent people died, there was nothing to be done.

-The End of Report-