



Ansar¹ personnel allegedly killed three workers in Kushtia

Fact Finding Report

Odhikar

The workers of Akij bidi factory in Hosenabad village under Doulatpur thana in Kushtia district were demanding a wage increment for a long time. On July 15, 2012 at around 12:00pm, when they again demanded a wage raise, the factory manager Mohammad Khorshed Alam, on behalf of the owner, announced that their wages will not be increased. As a result, an argument broke out between him and the workers. At that time, according to sources, Ansar members present on guard at the factory fired at the workers on the order of Khorshed Alam. Mohammad Rokibul Islam (25), son of late Bhadu Mathila and Mosammat Shurjohar Khatun of Boiragir Chor village, and Mintu Ali (28), son of Mohammad Kachhim Uddin and Bedena Khatun died on the spot after receiving shots triggered by the Ansar members. One Mohammad Nazrul Islam (38), son of Mohammad Hazrat Molla and Mosammat Anzera Khatun, was admitted at the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital on July 16, 2012 after he was wounded by gunshots during that incident. He died on July 17, 2012 at around 3:30am while being moved to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for better treatment.

During the fact finding mission Odhikar learned that a worker and a helper together can make 12,000 Bidis (handmade local cigarettes) daily. The owner pays Tk 21 for 1000 Bidis. Therefore, a worker receives Tk 252 after working for the whole day and from that money he gives Tk 66 to the helper. In an inflationary market, the Bidi workers and helpers are having a hard time running their households with the wage they earn. So, the workers were demanding an increase in wage by Tk 4 for every 1000 Bidis.

¹ The Bangladesh Ansar (also known as the Ansar Bahini) is a disciplined force for the preservation of internal security and law enforcement in Bangladesh.

Odhikar carried out a fact finding mission into the incident. During the fact finding mission Odhikar interviewed:

- The relatives of the three dead persons
- Witness
- Labour Leader
- The doctor who examined the three bodies
- The person who washed the bodies
- The manager of Akij Bidi Factory, Khorshed Alam and
- Members of law enforcement agency



Picture: Mintu Ali



Picture: Md. Rokibul Islam



Picture: Md. Najrul Islam

Mohammad Ashraful Islam (22), Labour leader:

Mohammad Ashraful Islam informed Odhikar that in May 2012 the workers of Akij Bidi factory demanded a raise in their wages from the owner. Their demand was that they be paid Tk 25 instead of Tk 21 for every 1000 Bidis they make. The owners did not accept this demand of the workers. As a result, the workers observed a 5-day strike from May 26, 2012 to May 30, 2012. On May 30, 2012 it was announced through a microphone, on behalf of the factory that there would be a discussion regarding the wage increase in Akij Bidi factory the next day. Upon hearing this news, the workers came to the factory the next day and presented their demand for wage increment at the discussion. In presence of the Officer in-charge (OC) of Doulatpur thana, Mohammad Lutfor Rahman, it was decided in the discussion that the wage of the workers would be increased from July 15, 2012. On July 14, 2012 at around 6:00pm, a few workers met with the manager. The manager, Khorshed Alam informed them that it is not possible to increase their wages. After hearing that, the workers left. On July 15, 2012 the workers came to the factory in the morning and began working as usual. At around 12:00pm a few worker representatives went to the manager again and wanted to know about the wage increase. The manager said that it is not possible to increase their wages and workers not willing to work at the current wage rate can leave the factory. At one stage he verbally abused them and got them out of his room. After

coming out of the manager's room, the workers were enraged and started staging protests in front of the building and threw stones aimed towards the manager's room. They vandalised two trucks inside the factory and began leaving the factory. When almost half the workers inside the factory had left, the Ansar members closed the main gate of the factory. The workers went to the west gate of the factory and tried to break open the lock. At the time he suddenly heard gunshots. He came out of the factory and saw Mintu Ali's body lying on the ground in front of the factory and Rokibul's body on the east side. The workers staged a demonstration after the two workers were killed. After some time the police Superintendent of Kushtia, Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Doulatpur Upazila, Orun Kumar Mondol, Officer in-charge of Doulatpur Police Station Mohammad Lutfur Rahman along with many other police and RAB and administrative officers came to the factory. They told the workers to stop their protest and calm down and assured that they would provide compensation to the families of the deceased. Then the labourers stopped the demonstration.

Mohammad Murshid (28), Husband of Mintu Ali's sister:

Mohammad Murshid told Odhikar that he is a worker of Akij Bidi factory and also the husband of fellow worker Mintu Ali's sister. On July 15, 2012 like any other day, workers arrived at the factory at the usual time. At around 12:00pm, a few workers went to the manager Khorshed Alam's office and were locked into altercation with him. Then Murshid was getting out of the factory and he noticed that the Ansar members were wearing helmets and getting ready with firearms to contain a workers' protest. He got out of the factory and saw his brother-in-law Mintu standing on one side of the road with his bicycle. When he went a bit farther from the factory, he heard few gunshots. After some time he heard from fellow workers that the two workers were killed and a few were injured in the firing by Ansar members. At around 1:00pm he went towards the factory and saw the bodies of Rokibul and Mintu lying on the ground.

Mosammat Razia Khatun (37), wife of Mohammad Nazrul Islam:

Mosammat Razia Khatun informed Odhikar that on July 15, 2012 at around 6:00am her husband Mohammad Nazrul Islam went to the Akij Bidi factory. At around 1:00pm she came to know from a colleague of her husband that there has been a clash between the management of Akij Bidi factory and the workers. Her husband was shot by Ansar members during the clash. Later, workers Lalchan, Ariful and Mukul together took Nazrul to Kushtia 250-bed General Hospital. The hospital authority advised them to take Nazrul to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for better treatment. Nazrul's brother Rezaul took him to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. Nazrul informed her through cell phone that as his condition did not improve even after an operation at the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, he will be moved to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Nazrul died on the way to Dhaka on July 17, 2012 at around 3:30am.

Mohammad Monirul Islam (22), injured worker:

Mohammad Monirul Islam told Odhikar on July 15, 2012 he went to the factory at around 5:00am. At around 12:00 pm he came to know from fellow workers that the factory authorities decided not to increase their wages. Upon hearing this news, workers stopped working and were preparing to leave. He was also leaving the factory for home. At that time he saw the Ansar members preparing with firearms and helmets. He came out of the factory and waited at the Mahogany garden situated on the east for his younger brother Roshidul Haque, who was still inside. After 5/7 minutes he heard two gunshots. He then went near the factory gate to look for Roshidul. At that time a bullet hit him between his right knee and his ankle. He fell on the floor and saw other workers running around. After some time two labourers, Mohammad Khokon and Shohidul came to him. He was bleeding from his knees, and feet. Later, Khokon and Shohidul put a bandage on his wound. They took him to Doulatpur Upazilla Health Complex at around 1.00 pm. He was given first aid there. From there, at around 2:30pm Shiraj and Shohidul took him to Kushtia General Hospital on an ambulance. After being treated there, he was shifted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital and Ad-Din hospital in Dhaka.

Mohammad Khorshed Alam, Manager Akij Bidi Factory, Hosenabad, Doulatpur, Kushtia:

Mohammad Khorshed Alam told Odhikar that 2,500 labourers work at Akij Bidi Factory. Every worker makes 12,000 Bidis daily. Every worker is paid Tk 21 for every 1000 Bidis, so in total each worker receives Tk 252 per day. A labourer who works six days a week is given Tk 100 as a bonus and a worker who works for the entire month is given another Tk 100 bonus. The workers have been demanding a wage increase since the beginning of 2012. The workers observed a strike from May 26, 2012 to May 30, 2012 to fulfill their demand for increasing wages. He informed the chairman of Akij Bidi Factory Dr. Sheikh Mohiuddin about this matter. As per the orders of Dr. Sheikh Mohiuddin, he conducted a discussion regarding the wage increment with the workers on May 31, 2012. In the discussion, following the order of the owner, he informed the workers, that their wages will be increased from July 15, 2012. On July 14, 2012 at around 6:00pm a few workers met with him and he told them that as the owner is not in the country, their wages will not be increased from July 15, 2012. Upon hearing this, the workers left without any protest. On July 15, 2012 the workers began work as usual. At around 12:00pm, a few workers from outside came to the factory and began throwing stones and vandalised two trucks inside the factory. In the meantime, the workers stole materials from the factory's warehouse. When the Ansar members tried to stop them, they began hurling stones at the Ansar camp. The Ansar members opened fire at the workers in an act of self-defence. At around 12:30pm, he informed the Chairman of Akij Bidi Factory Dr. Sheikh Mohiuddin, the Officer in-charge (OC) of Doulatpur Police Station Mohammad Lutfur Rahman, and the police Superintendent of Kushtia, Mofiz Uddin Ahmed about the workers' protest through cell phone. The workers became even more agitated when Rokibul and Mintu Ali were shot by the Ansar. Later, with the orders of the Chairman Dr. Sheikh Mohiuddin, he informed the workers that the family of the deceased workers would receive Tk 5 lakhs and the factory will bear all treatment

expenses of the injured workers. Also, their demand for an increase in wage will also be accepted. At around 6:00 pm he was taken to the Doulatpur Police Station in police custody. On July 18, 2012 he was released from Doulatpur Police Station. The factory was closed from July 15, 2012 to July 28, 2012. The factory resumed its work from July 29, 2012. He informed that later the demand of the workers were fulfilled.

Dr. Selina Sultana Sriti, Medical Officer, 50-bed Upazila Health Complex, Doulatpur, Kushtia:

Dr. Selina Sultana Sriti informed Odhikar that on July 15, 2012 at around 2:00pm a few men, namely Khokon, Kamrul, Montu Hasan and Hannan brought two men named Mintu Ali and Monirul Islam who had been shot, to the emergency department. At that time she declared Mintu Ali dead and bandaged the bullet wounds on Monirul Islam and sent him to Kushtia General Hospital for better treatment.

Dr. Taposh Kumar Sarkar, Resident Medical Officer, 250-Bed General Hospital, Kushtia:

Dr. Taposh Kumar Sarkar told Odhikar that on July 16, 2012 at around 8:10am, Doulatpur Police brought bodies of two men named Rokibul Islam and Mintu Ali to the morgue. Mintu Ali's serial number is-108 and Rokibul's serial number is-109. He performed the autopsy on both the bodies. He informed that there were marks of gunshots on the chests of both Rokibul Islam and Mintu Ali.

Rezaul Karim, Assistant Ansar Commander, AkijBidi Factory, Hosenabad, Doulatpur, Kushtia:

Rezaul Karim informed Odhikar that on July 15, 2012 when the workers were protesting, he along with his fellow Ansar members fired blanks following the order of manager Mohammad Khorshed Alam. He was unwilling to speak about the death of three men in the firing by the Ansar.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Shopon Kumar, Doulatpur Thana, Kushtia:

Sub-Inspector (SI) Shopon Kumar told Odhikar that on July 15, 2012 at around 12:00pm he prepared the inquest report of Mohammad Rokibul Islam, Mintu Ali and Mohammad Nazrul Islam who died due to the firing of Ansar force at the workers protest at Akij Bidi factory in Hosenabad, Doulatpur. He prepared Mohammad Rokibul Islam's inquest report on July 15, 2012 at around 3:30pm, Mintu Ali's inquest report at around 4:00pm and Mohammad Nazrul Islam's inquest report on July 17, 2012 at around 9:00am. He observed marks of gunshots on the chest and back of all three of their bodies. After completing the inquest reports he submitted them to the Officer in-charge (OC) Mohammad Lutfur Rahman.

Mohammad Omar Faruk, Upazila Ansar and in-charge of village defense team, Doulatpur, Kushtia:

Mohammad Omar Faruk told Odhikar that on July 15, 2012 at around 1:00pm, Assistant Ansar Commander on duty at Akij Bidi factory in Hosenabad, Rezaul Karim informed him on mobile phone that as the workers of the Akij Bidi factory were staging protests in order to fulfill their demand of wage increment, the Ansar force fired at them following instructions of manager Khorshed Alam to stop them. After receiving the news, he went to the factory at around 4:00pm. He talked to the Ansar members in the manager's room. He got to know from Assistant Ansar Commander Rezaul Karim that when the protesters wanted to enter the manager's room, manager Khorshed Alam ordered them to fire at the workers. At around 12:15pm, in order to contain the workers' protest and following the order of the manager, Ansar Raihanul fired five rounds, Ansar Liton Ali fired one and Ansar Aiub fired one round and Rezaul Karim fired one shot. After that he examined whether the rifles in the inventory of the Ansar force were in place or not. Among the 110 round bullets that were outside, 102 of them were in place and the blank cartridge/shell of 8 of them was seen lying around. After that he assured that the workers that their demands will be met.

Mohammad Lutfor Rahman, Officer in-charge (O.C), Doulatpur Police Station, Kushtia:

Mohammad Lutfor Rahman told Odhikar that a meeting with the workers was held on May 31, 2012 at the AkijBidi Factory. He was present at the meeting. In the meeting, it was informed, on behalf of the owners that the wages of the workers will be increased from July 15, 2012. On July 15, 2012 at around 12:30pm, factory manager Khorshed Alam informed him that the workers were doing a revolt so that their demand for the pay rise was fulfilled. After receiving the news, he went to Akij Bidi Factory with his force and saw Rokibul's dead body lying on the east of the factory and Mintu Ali's dead body lying on the road. Inside the factory he saw pieces of bricks, broken branches of trees and shattered glass of the trucks. He asked the agitated workers to calm down and upon receiving instruction from the owners he informed them that compensation will be given to the family members of the deceased. After talking to Ansars present in the factory, he came to know that they fired upon receiving orders from the factory manager Khorshed Alam. In the evening, when the environment returned to normalcy, he closed 13 Ansar members and the manager and took them to Doulatpur Police Station. Mintu Ali's brother Sentu Hossen Ali filed a case in this matter, against unknown people. The case number is: 17; dated: 26/7/2012. Section: 324/326/307/302/34 of the Penal Code.

Mohammad Shah Alam, District Commandant, Ansar and VDP, Kushtia:

Mohammad Shah Alam informed Odhikar that on July 15, 2012 he came to know from television that two workers died in firing by the Ansar. On July 17, 2012 he went to Doulatpur. After talking to the Ansar personnel who were in police custody, he came to know that they fired

at the workers on order from the factory manager Khorshed Alam. On July 18, 2012 he came back to Doulatpur as a member of the divisional investigation team and at the same day at around 6:00pm he took the 13 Ansar members who were in police custody to the Ansar office in Kushtia district. He did not want to tell anything more.

Arun Kumar Mondol, Director, Ansar and VDP Khulna range, Khulna:

Arun Kumar Mondol told Odhikar that on July 15, 2012 that the Director General of Ansar and VDP Major General Zahidur Rahman formed a investigation committee of three members to investigate the incident of death of two workers from the firing of Ansar members at Akij Bidi Factory. He was the Chief of the committee and two other members were Commandant of Ansar and VDP of Jhenidah, Shah Alam Fazle Rabbi and Commandant of Ansar and VDP of Chuadanga ATM Mostafa. On July 31, 2012 he submitted the investigation report to the Director General of Ansar and VDP. Arun Kumar Mondol also added that he stated in the report that due to fault of the Akij Bidi Factory authorities, the Ansar members fired at the workers.

Mohammad Zahir Hossain, Inspector (investigation), Doulatpur, Kushtia:

Mohammad Zahir Hossain told Odhikar that on July 16, 2012 Sentu Hossain of Boiragirchor, Bhangapara village filed a case. He is the investigation officer of that case and the case is under investigation. He was unwilling to say anything more.

Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, Police Superintendent, Kushtia:

Mofiz Uddin Ahmed informed Odhikar that on July 15, 2012, he went to the Akij Bidi Factory in Hosenabad, Doulatpur, after receiving the news that two workers were killed during a protest demanding a pay rise at the AkijBidi Factory. He asked the workers to calm down as he came to visit the place. He assured the workers that their demands will be fulfilled as the authorities confirmed. That evening, 13 members of the Ansar and the factory manager were closed and taken to Doulatpur Police Station. On July 18, 2012 the Akij Bidi Factory provided the families of Rokibul, Nazrul and Mintu a check of Tk 5 Lakh each.

Statement of Odhikar

Odhikar is observing that no one among the accused Ansar members or the manager of Akij Bidi Factory, who allegedly ordered firing on the workers, was arrested. Although four months have passed since the incident, no step has been taken except giving assurance of compensation to the victim workers. Odhikar demands the arrest of Mohammad Khorshed Alam and accused Ansar members and a fair trial and punishment of the perpetrators.