

Murdered, then falsely labelled

Family, locals reject 'IS claim' that slain RU teacher promoted atheism, say he was a believer, kind to people of all religions

ANWAR ALI, back from Bagmara

While a reported statement of Islamic State labelled him as a promoter of atheism, Prof AFM Rezaul Karim Siddiquee was a believer who was kind to everyone irrespective of religion, according to his family members and people of his home village.

Apart from organising folk music programmes and sports competitions in his village Dorgamaria under Bagmara upazila, Prof Rezaul contributed for a mosque and a madrasa there.

Recently, he spent Tk 1.5 lakh for the mosque's renovation. He also donated a handsome amount for turning the tin-shed structure of the madrasa into a building and the work is going on. He had promised more, locals said.

The 58-year-old professor of English at Rajshahi University also established a music school in the village. It was built of bamboo, palm leaf and tin sheet.

"We never had enough money. But my father used to donate for

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Murdered

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religious activities," said his daughter Rizwana Hasin Shotovi.

Though not strictly pious, he used to say prayers and follow many Islamic rituals, she added.

Hours after Prof Rezaul was brutally murdered in Shalbagan area of Rajshahi city on Saturday, militant group Islamic State reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.

"#ISIS' Amaq Agency reported the group's responsibility for killing Rajshahi Univ. prof Rezaul Karim for 'calling to atheism' in #Bangladesh," US-based SITE Intelligence Group tweeted at 4:49pm.

The attack follows the killing of another RU teacher, Prof KM Shafiq Islam, who was stabbed dead near his residence on November 15, 2014.

Prof Shafiq too had a great fascination for music just as Prof Rezaul, who was a sitar player and cultural activist.

An unknown group, calling itself Mujahideen fi Sabilillah, had claimed responsibility for the murder of

Shafiq in a post on its Facebook page Ansar Al Islam Bangladesh-2.

The post had also warned "atheists" of similar consequences.

Family members of Rezaul and villagers irrespective of religion said Prof Rezaul was never an atheist. His activities proved that he was a true believer of Islam and also kind to people of other religions, they said.

Suspecting that Islamist militants killed the professor, a farmer of his Dorgamaria village, Rohidul Islam, said, "Who will now take charge of the development of the mosque and the madrasa? Will they [the killers] come and spend money for the work?"

Rezaul's son Riyasat Imtiaz Sourav said his father used to emphasise the love for God. "He taught us that God should be loved, not feared."

The professor's wife Husne Ara said he always advised her to have faith in Allah and pray to the Almighty for anything she needs. "He was a true

believer."

Also yesterday, Additional DMP Commissioner Monirul Islam told reporters in the capital that the claim that IS carried out the attack on Prof Rezaul is "baseless".

There is no organisational existence of the militant group in Bangladesh, he added.

PROTEST

In protest against the gruesome murder, teachers and students of the university boycotted all classes yesterday and demonstrated on the campus.

They will go for a tougher agitation for an indefinite period if the killers were not brought to book in 48 hours. The decision came at an executive committee meeting of Rajshahi University Teachers Association (Ruta) on Saturday night, said its General Secretary Shah Azam Shantanu.

Hundreds of students and teachers of English department demonstrated in front of the Senate building wearing

black badges at 10:00am and later blocked Dhaka-Rajshahi highway in front of the main entrance to the campus for 10 minutes, demanding a prompt and fair investigation into the killing.

Addressing a press conference at his office, Prof AFM Masud Akhter, chair of English department, said all classes and examinations of the department will remain suspended till tomorrow.

Meanwhile, over 500 members of Ruta held a mourning rally on the university's Paris Road from around 10:30am.