

A Politician-Criminal Arrested in an Interesting Case

February 29, 2024

February 29, 2024: **Kolkata**, West Bengal, India: “**Shahjehan Sheikh** was arrested, after midnight of 28th February from the Guest House of a Fish farm in Minakhah, in the District of North 24 Parganas,’ said Aminul Islam Khan, the Sub-Divisional Police Officer said.

The arrest showed that **in a democratic system, a criminal**, however clever and influential he may be, **cannot escape the long hands of law.**

Shahjehan Sheikh, a **Trinamool Congress (TMC)** leader, is widely regarded as TMC's most prominent figure in the area, spanning from ‘**Sandeshkhali**, in the District of North 24 Parganas’, to ‘**Malancha**, in the District of South 24 Parganas’. **TMC is the ruling party in West Bengal.** **Sandeshkhali** is a block of several villages nestled between lakes and marshes of the lower Ganga wetlands.



Shahjehan Sheikh, a TMC leader

BACKGROUND: It is said that **Shahjehan Sheikh** (born 1971) migrated from BanglaDesh and started working as a worker in a fish farm and as a road-side vegetable vendor. By 1999, he was involved in various businesses including **bheris**, (meaning “*local level strong-*

arm extortion activities, in the name of helping the poor”), brick kilns, transportation at local levels, and vegetable syndicates. **Shahjehan** entered politics in 2003, inspired by his uncle **Moslem Sheikh**'s involvement with **Communist Party Marxist** (CPM). Subsequently, he was elected as the **Panchayat Pradhan** (means “*Chief of the Village*”). CPM was the ruling party in West Bengal **from 1977 to 2011**. (CPM rule was **the longest period of rule by a Communist Party** through winning elections every 5 years **in a democratic country**.) By 2009, **Shahjehan** and his uncle had become so influential, with a large gang of goons under them, that even though **CPM** lost power in 2011, till 2013, the people in the area continued to acknowledge the authority of **Shahjehan**.

In 2013, **Shahjehan** aligned himself with **TMC**, the new ruling party of the State, since 2011. Such was his influence in the region that **Shahjehan** in 2021, renamed a market after his own name.

WHY WAS **Shahjehan** arrested on FEBRUARY 29, 2024: On January 5, 2024, officers of **Enforcement Directorate** (ED), an Agency of Government of India, which arrests and prosecutes those involved in **Money Laundering** (i.e. those, who have assets, larger than their income), visited **Shahjehan**'s office to enquire about his sources of income. A large number of goons attacked the Officers of ED with sticks. The **ED Officers were hospitalized with severe injuries**.

Shahjehan understood the serious problems, which could arise, when Government's Officers were attacked. So, he stopped going to his office for some days. The local police arrested two persons, who were leading the attack on the ED Officers. The two persons were goons of **Shahjehan**.

This encouraged the poor, in **Sandeshkhali**, who had suffered at the hands of and his goons. The lands of many powerless poor had been forcibly occupied by **Shahjehan**. Many women, from the families of the rural poor, had been sexually assaulted by **Shahjehan** and his goons.

The poor started complaining against **Shahjehan** and his goons for forcible occupation of lands, for sexual assaults and for dishonest practices in supplying ration to BPL families.

February 7, 2024: **Sandeshkhali** was rocked by violent protests, when poor villagers descended upon the poultry farm linked to Shahjehan's aide and set it on fire.

The Central Government had found that a minister in the State Government had permitted many rural leaders of TMC to indulge in corrupt practices in allocation of ration

to the poor. (For many decades, the ration shops in India have been giving subsidized food grains to families, **Below Poverty Line (BPL)**, as defined by learned economists of the Central Government.)

Shubhendu Adhikari, a leader of **Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)**, one of the two national parties in India, and **Sukant Majumdar**, a spokesperson of BJP in West Bengal, started supporting the poor in **Sandeshkhali** and demanding action against **Shahjehan Sheikh**.



BJP demanding justice for the poor women of **Sandeshkhali**

Feb 12, 2024: **C.V. Anand Bose**, the Governor of West Bengal, visited **Sandeshkhali** and personally listened to the complaints of the poor and forwarded them to the Chief Minister of West Bengal and to the Central Government for necessary action.

A team of **West Bengal Women's Commission** visited **Sandeshkhali**, in the district of North 24 Parganas, on Monday morning, and spoke to women in the area who have alleged sexual harassment by the absconding TMC leader **Shahjehan Sheikh** and his supporters. **Leena Gangopadhyay**, the Chairperson of the Commission, listened to the complaints of several women in **Sandeshkhali**.

On Feb 13, 2024, the Calcutta High Court took suo moto notice of the complaints of the poor and constituted a **Special Investigation Team (SIT)** for probing the complaints. The SIT included the Officers of the State's Police and of ED. The ED appealed and sought a stay on the verdict, probably because ED did not trust the State's Police in this case and did not want to share the evidence, ED had against **Shahjehan**. The Chief Justice's bench allowed that request and scheduled a hearing on March 6, 2024.

Partha Bhowmick, the Irrigation Minister of the State of Bengal, and **Sujit Bose**, the Fire and Emergency Services Minister of the State of Bengal, visited some of the areas where protests took place but the agitation continued.

Sunday, February 25, 2024: When there was a criticism of the State's Police for the long delay in the arrest of **Shahjehan, Abhishek Banerjee**, an important leader of TMC, claimed that his party was not defending the missing leader, **Sheikh Shahjehan**, but the High Court had tied the hands of the State's police. At Delhi, when **Sagarika Ghose**, the TMC MP (Elect) of the **Rajya Sabha** (meaning *the Upper House of the Indian Parliament*) was asked about **Sandeshkhali** and about the long delay in the arrest of **Sheikh Shahjehan**, she said, "The Government of Bengal is acting in **Sandeshkhali**. **Mamata Banerjee**, the **Chief Minister** (CM) of Bengal has promised action, the Government is acting and it will continue to act. So far, over 20 arrests have been made. There is a whole team in **Sandeshkhali** at the moment, camps have been set up, complaints are being registered and **land is being returned to all those who are aggrieved**. There is a Police probe going on. Two senior women Police officers are investigating...Key aides of **Sheikh Shahjehan** have been arrested. So, if the Government of Bengal wanted to shield **Sheikh Shahjehan**, would it arrest and put behind bars his own key aides? No one is being shielded, no one is being protected. No one will escape the law...The TMC and the Bengal Govt are on the ground, they are working and there is every reason to believe that **Sheikh Shahjehan** will be arrested very soon."

www.DiGiNews360.com wants to draw the attention of Ms. **Ghose** to the irony of arrest of within a few hours of permitting ED and CBI to arrest **Shahjehan** vs 55 days of delay when the State's Police was the only Agency, supposed to arrest **Shahjehan** and ED and CBI, the Agencies of the Central Government, were not permitted to do so.

On Sunday, TMC suspended **Sheikh Shahjehan** from TMC for 6 years. TMC also sacked **Ajit Maiti**, a local TMC leader, who was Secretary of the Anchal (meaning "Zone") at **Sandeshkhali**, after villagers accused him of helping Shahjehan grab farmlands over the last few years.

On the same day, i.e. on Sunday, an “independent **Fact-Finding Committee**” led by **L. Narasimha Reddy**, a former Chief Justice of Patna High Court was stopped by police from proceeding to Sandeshkhali. Reddy, accompanied by former IPS officer **Raj Pal Singh**, former National Commission for Women member **Charu Wali Khanna**, advocates **OP Vyas** and **Bhavna Bajaj**, and senior journalist **Sanjeev Nayak** were detained by the State’s Police of Bengal and taken in a vehicle to an area outside **Sandeshkhali**, and later released.

“This is completely illegal. We have told the police personnel as law-abiding citizens we will not break rules. No curfew has been imposed in **Sandeshkhali**. So, we can go in two groups. At least two of our women members should be allowed to visit the females who had borne the brunt of atrocities of musclemen, enjoying political patronage and impunity from police action in all these days, till the media unraveled the shocking truth,” Reddy said.

On Monday, February 26, 2024, the Calcutta High Court Chief Justice ordered to add the TMC leader **Sheikh Shahjehan** to the **Sandeshkhali** case and said, "Public notice shall be given in this case. There is no stay order in **Sandeshkhali** cases. There is no that to not arrest him". On February 28, 2024, the HC said that CBI or ED could also arrest **Sheikh Shahjehan**. www.DiGiNews360.com feels that after 55 days of attack on ED of January 5, 2024, the State’s Police arrested **Shahjehan** at the midnight of February 28-29, 2024, because TMC did not want that **Shahjehan** should be in the custody of an Agency of the Central Government. When **Shahjehan** was presented before the Court at Bashirhaat, he did not submit that he was innocent and his lawyer agreed to a remand of one week in the custody of State’s police. When **Shahjehan** was coming out of the Court, his demeanor was of a person, who had succeeded in out-smarting ED and CBI.

The State’s Police has permitted the **Fact-Finding Committee**” led by **L. Narasimha Reddy** to visit **Sandeshkhali** on March 1, 2024.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

The Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** is expected to visit Bengal on March 6, 2024 to campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. However, it is not yet known whether he would visit **Sandeshkhali**.

----A Brief BACKGROUNDER on Evolution of Naxalites in West Bengal----

West Bengal is a State, large rural parts of which remained under the influence (virtual control), from 1967-73, of **Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI(ML))**, a Maoist party.

After 1973, CPI(ML) split into 40 different factions, jointly known as **Naxalbaris**, named after the village in West Bengal, where **Charu Majmudar**, a Marxist, gained control in 1967. Some of the 40 factions survived through extortion, from businesses near the large belt of jungles, spread out from the State of **Orissa** to the State of **Andhra Pradesh**.

The extortions were justified by the **Naxalbaris** through use of the Marxist-revolutionary theories.

Slowly, these groups are dying out.
