

Suhrawardy's anniversary of death today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation today remembers respectfully Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, one of the great leaders of undivided India, on his 41st death anniversary.

The political wisdom and uncompromising leadership of Suhrawardy, who dedicated his life for public welfare by upholding democracy above all, made him a great statesman of his time.

President Iajuddin Ahmed in a message paid homage to Suhrawardy, saying he is a shining

chapter of Bangladesh's history of democracy. His uncompromising struggle against undemocratic and autocratic forces has made him a unique political personality.

The president said a champion of democracy, Suhrawardy's lifelong mission was to ensure welfare of the common people through establishing democracy.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in her message said Shaheed Suhrawardy was a great personality in the political history of the sub-continent. In his long political career, he upheld the value of

Explosives

FROM PAGE 12

under speedy trial by 60 more days. Anisur has all along been making contradictory statements regarding his involvement with Islamist militants. Earlier in Gaibandha he admitted his involvement with Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, said sources.

He said Harun-ur-Rashid of village Barokona under Shaghata upazila recruited him to Harkat-ul-Jihad. He was lured in the militant outfit by promises of a 'guaranteed entrance to heaven' while a fortune on earth.

On the night of November 11, dictated by Harun he met Anisur Hossain at Tanin Student Hostel in Gaibandha town. The next morning he went to Gaibandha Railway Station, where Naim handed him a bag containing explosives and asked him to go to Bogra by a local train. But police at Bonapara Station arrested him.

Islamist militant leader Harun, who hailed from village Barokona, is on the run from police.

Riip to help farmers

FROM PAGE 12

complete, the cost would come down to no more than Tk5, Khayer says. He describes how cumbersome it was to travel along a muddy road during the rains. So, he prays for the road builders. "They are fulfilling something that we have dreamt for long."

The road, which connects the two rural 'growth centres', Narkelbaria and Kaliganj, with the highway linking Jhenidaha, Jessore and the capital, is set to make all the locals as happy as Khayer. They now hope to market their produce directly to the capital and earn much more than the past.

Construction of the Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED)-supervised road started last June and is scheduled to be completed by next September.

In fact, millions of farmers in the 16 districts of greater Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna, Patuakhali and Barisal are now expecting good days ahead while the construction of link-and-feeder-roads goes on in the areas. Nearly 1,060km of upazila roads and 50km of union roads with 5.05km of bridges and culverts are being built in the areas under the Rural Infrastructure Improvement Project (Riip).

Launched in July 2003 the Riip aims to develop 68 rural growth centres, build 100 new union council complexes, set up 55 river wharves, introduce ferry service at five points as well as provide capacity building training. The \$170 million project is scheduled to be completed by June 2009.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has promised 51 percent of the project cost while Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) and German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) will contribute 18 percent and the government the rest, 31 percent.

Eighty-percent fund of the Riip will be used for the civil works in the 16 beneficiary districts and the rest, 20 percent, for capacity building of 32 union councils.

"The project will open up new economic vistas for the rural poor, and reduce transportation and marketing costs to a high extent," says Abdus Sahid, the project director.

GTZ Country Director Michael Nienhaus says, "The project area has been chosen on the basis of poverty and low level of development, as almost half of the 22.6 million people of this area live in abject poverty."

How the emerging infrastructure is already helping farmers get better markets for their products is demonstrated by Sohail Islam, 18, a vegetable farmer of Kefayetnagar, who carries eggplants just plucked from the fields on his bicycle to Haibutpur Bazaar nearly 5km away.

democracy and freedom and contributed immensely to promote people's well-being.

"The prime objective of his politics was to ensure welfare of the people and establish good governance," Khaleda said.

Paying reverence for Suhrawardy, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in her message said the nation will always remember him for his contributions to democracy, rule of law and communal harmony.

The Bangladesh Betar, and the state-run and private TV channels will air special programmes on the life and activities of Suhrawardy today. National dailies will also publish special articles on the great leader.

Different organisations have arranged programmes to observe the day. Today's programmes will start by offering munajat and placing wreaths at the mazar of Suhrawardy in the morning.

Shun

FROM PAGE 12

auditorium along with stage and cafeteria, has been estimated to cost Tk29.2 crore.

Three art galleries in an area of 65,000 square feet will be built in the third phase at a cost of Tk20.03 crore.

The National Music and Dance Center, to be built in two phases, will cost Tk34.06 crore. The first phase of the centre that includes infrastructure up to the third floor has been completed at a cost of Tk14.84 crore.

Earlier, the prime minister unveiled the plaques separately of the three units on the academy premises in Segun Bagicha area. Presided over by State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman, the inaugural function was also addressed by Minister for Housing and Public Works Mirza Abbas, Secretary for Cultural Affairs Kazi Abul Kashem and Director General of Shilpakala Academy Ahmed Nazir.

Ministers and a large number of cultural leaders and workers were present on the occasion.

The Prime Minister was also presented with a crest at the function. She also witnessed a brief cultural programme of dance and drama staged in the newly built main hall of the National Theatre.

Triple Murders

Arrest warrant against Jubo Dal leader Kajal

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued warrant of arrest against Jubo Dal leader Rafiqul Islam Kajal and seven others for the triple murder of an Old Dhaka businessman, his son and chauffeur in March this year.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shamim Ara Khatun accepted the charge sheet in the case and issued the warrant after scrutinising the case docket (CD) and other related documents.

Earlier, the court had directed Sufia Haq, complainant in the case, to appear before it yesterday as it needed her opinion for accepting the charge sheet.

Sufia appeared before the court and appealed to it to accept the charge sheet, earlier submitted to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Police on October 5 pressed charges against main accused Kajal and eight others.

Businessman Mohammad Shamsul Haq, his son Russel Sheikh, and chauffeur Moazzem Hossain were abducted on March 26 and butchered allegedly in a bid to grab a hosiery market and Tk5 lakh.

The charge sheet accused Kajal's brother M Sirajul Islam alias Faruq, Malay Sarker, Bhutto alias Abu Taleb, Kazi Noor Kayum, Kalam alias Narsinghdi Kalam, Md Mintoo, Nizam alias Mirzon and Md Rahim of abetting the grisly murder.

Of the accused, Rahim is in jail custody and prime accused Kajal, and the rest are absconding.

During investigation, Rahim gave a confessional statement to a magistrate disclosing the names of his fellow culprits.

BCL agitates at Ctg to protest Mohim killing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) city unit yesterday staged demonstration in front of Chittagong Press Club to protest the death of its central leader Mohim in 'crossfire' in Rapid Action Battalion's (Rab) custody.

A few hundred BCL leaders and activists, mostly students from Government City College and Omar Ghani MES College, turned up in procession and held a rally.

The speakers at the rally termed deaths in crossfire a gross violation of human rights and pre-planned killing by the Rab 'at the direction of Jamaat-Shibir.' They warned the government of tougher agitation if 'deaths in crossfire' continue to happen.

The Rab arrested Mohim on November 28 at Shah Amanat International Airport. He was killed in a 'shootout' between the Rab and criminals loyal to him, said the Rab.

Work on tunnel

FROM PAGE 12

"accountability" for road digging and, if necessary, awarding "punishment" to those violating the rules of the DTCC.

The meeting discussed various development works under the DUTP, including development of three inter-district bus terminals, development of road corridors and road intersections in the capital, installing the remaining 21 earthquake-prevention STU machines in the Mahakhal flyover, construction of footbridges at Progoti Sarani and Bangla Motor and establishment of electronic traffic signals at 69 important road intersections.

State Minister for Communications Salah Uddin Ahmed, Communications secretary Md Shafiqul Islam, Divisional Commissioner Mita Mustafa Ahmed, chairman of BRTA Faruq Ahmed, Executive Director of DTCC MA Momen, Director General of Bangladesh Railway AFM Mustafizur Rahman and representatives from finance ministry, home ministry, local government ministry, BIWTA, DCC, BRTC, DMP and Rajuk were present.

He later joined the Press Foundation of Asia as its Executive Director in the 1970s. In 1981, he became Unesco's Regional Communication Advisor for Asia and the Pacific and was based in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur.

Ali returned to Bangladesh in

4.5m disabled

FROM PAGE 12

to ensure safe future for children. The ratio of disabled children is much higher in war-ravaged and disaster-prone countries, he said.

The minister mentioned that the ratio of disabled people in war-affected Afghanistan is over 20 percent of the total population while the average ratio of the disabled in other developing countries is around 10 percent.

Describing government efforts for welfare of the disabled in the country, the minister hoped they would find proper place in the society shortly.

The inaugural session was also addressed by Vice-chancellor of Dhaka University SAMA Paiz, Unesco Country Representative Wolfgang Vollman, James Jennings of Unicef, Prof Peter D Mumford from UK, Prof Sultana S Zaman, Prof Nasheba Khatun and Shirin Z Munir.

Paiz said disabled children could be integrated into the society only through proper education.

Vollman said the issue of disability should be addressed every day, instead of observing a day for the handicapped. Unesco is working hard to improve their lot, he added.

He stressed public and private sector cooperation to create a better environment for the disabled.

Sultana said people are gradually realising that handicapped people have the right to get proper education and healthcare, and live a normal life.

Pumfrey underscored action-based vision for the betterment of children with disability.

A number of papers were presented at the working session of the seminar in the afternoon. National Professor M R Khan chaired the session.

Prof Nalza Zaman Khan presented a key-note paper on prevention and early detection of childhood disability.

Govt plans

FROM PAGE 12

now stands 11th in terms of CNG consumption in the world.

"The government has provided facilities for private investors to lease land for setting up CNG station at only Tk 10 lakh," he said, adding that converting 10,000 vehicles to CNG-run ones and introducing 400 more CNG-run buses are also included in the project.

The state minister stressed the need for providing training for proper maintenance of CNG-run vehicles.

Presently there are 73 CNG filling stations of which 64 are in Dhaka and over 29,000 CNG run vehicles are plying the streets of which about 20,000 are converted, RPGL Managing Director Abdul Wadud said.

He also said that there are 38 conversion workshops in the country and about 900 vehicles are being converted into CNG-run ones every month.

Presently about 10 mmcf (million of cubic feet per day) of gas is used for running 29,000 CNG-run vehicles which is less than 1 percent of total gas consumption in the country, he added.

There has been marked improvement in terms of reduction of environmental pollution in Dhaka over the last few years, Abdul Wadud observed.

CNG codes specialist Nick White presented the key-note paper in the inaugural session of the workshop.

Resident representative of UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Larry Maramis and Chairman of Petrobangla SR Osmani also spoke on the occasion.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia along with others offers prayers after inaugurating the National Theatre, the National Art Gallery and the National Music and Dance Centre at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in the capital yesterday.

SM Ali's birth anniversary

FROM PAGE 12

nephew of famous writer Syed Mujtaba Ali and Syed Murtaja Ali. He died in 1993 in a Bangkok hospital at the age of 65.

SM Ali made his way up from a cub reporter to one of the country's most brilliant editors in a career spanning 44 years.

He was also chairman of the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB). He was educated in Calcutta, Dhaka and London.

SM Ali was one of the few Asian journalists who stood apart in regional journalism.

He started as a reporter with the Pakistan Observer during his student days at Dhaka University. He went on to hold important positions in various regional publications in Pakistan, Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore.

He later joined the Press Foundation of Asia as its Executive Director in the 1970s. In 1981, he became Unesco's Regional Communication Advisor for Asia and the Pacific and was based in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur.

Ali returned to Bangladesh in

Dhaka to tag strings

FROM PAGE 1

should also provide Bangladesh transit facilities to carry goods to Nepal, an issue that Dhaka has been pressing for long, Saifur observed.

"Discussions have to take place on the basis of these interrelated issues," he maintained.

Saifur will attend a three-day India Economic Summit co-organised by World Economic Forum and Confederation of Indian Industry, beginning tomorrow, where he will speak on the subject "Creating a Dynamic South Asian Region."

He will meet his Indian counterparts Palaniappan Chidambaram, External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh, Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar and Tata Group Chairman Ratan Tata.

He is likely to call on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and will meet former prime ministers Inder Kumar Gujral and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. India's National Security Adviser JN Dixit will call on Saifur at his hotel suite during his five-day trip.

"We want to improve relations with our neighbours with a fresh, liberal mindset and I will have talks on ways to further boosting ties between the two countries. Europe is marching ahead with a similar attitude... Leaders of the Saarc nations need to work collectively

burying past mindset," the finance minister said when asked what this India trip is all about.

This is Saifur's maiden trip to India after the Congress-led government came to office in May this year. On Bangladesh's having a free trade area (FTA) with India, he said since leaders of seven Saarc countries have agreed to put in place a South Asian Free Trade Area (Safra) in 2006, there is no need to have such a bilateral trade arrangement.

"It will be tantamount to degrading Safra if we go for a bilateral FTA now."

Asked if Safra or FTA will help Bangladesh to reduce the bilateral trade gap now heavily in favour of India, Saifur said it will not happen automatically. Bangladesh will have to raise the number of its exportable items and make them cost competitive on the one hand and India will have to liberalise its trade regime on the other.

Indian Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar is expected to push hard for a pipeline to carry natural gas from Myanmar through Bangladesh to India when he comes to Dhaka during the 13th Saarc Summit.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs last week shelved the gas pipeline proposal, saying it requires a 'high-level discussion' since it has implications on national security and inter-country relations.

Witness's version

Nurul Hoque, son of Haji Abdul Ali of Shyamalshi under Dharaliapara union of Savar, told reporters at the DMCH that while on his way home from a Jatayabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) meeting at Joyngur at around 4:00pm, he came across Sohrah.

He was talking to two of his friends on the culvert at Uttor Baherpur, when the Rab men pounced on them at around 6:00pm, he said.

"The Rab men straight way shot thrice at Sohrah," he said.

"I claimed myself innocent and pleaded not to shoot, but they turned a deaf ear and shot me in the stomach," he added.

"Rab men roamed for more than two and a half hours while I was bleeding bad," said Nurul. They took him to the DMCH at around 11:50pm.

Nurul claimed he had been in South Korea for 13 years and came to Dhaka during Ramadan. He was scheduled to fly back to South Korea on December 11.

He also claimed that Rab men seized his mobile phone and motorbike from the spot.

Keraniganj police sent Sohrah's body to Mitford Hospital for autopsy.

Locals of the area told The Daily Star that they heard gunshots at around 2:30pm.

Iraq suicide attacks

FROM PAGE 12

have been battling insurgents who staged an uprising in the city last month, attacking police stations and offices of the Kurds, who are close US allies.

In fierce fighting in the city on Friday, gunmen tried to storm four police stations but were repelled, the US military said. About 70 guerrillas also ambushed a US patrol with roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire. After regrouping, US and Iraqi forces struck back on insurgent positions, killing more than two dozen fighters, the military said.

The latest attacks, however, were particularly audacious and sent a clear message that the insurgents can strike wherever they choose.

The police station hit Saturday was just yards from the seat of American and Iraqi power in the country. On Friday, 11 carloads of gunmen attacked a police station, killing 16 policemen, on highway to Baghdad's international airport, which has been extremely dangerous despite frequent patrols by US troops.

Meanwhile, two American soldiers were killed Saturday by roadside bombs -- one in eastern Baghdad that wounded five other Americans, the other in the town of Ghalabiyah, 6 miles west of the insurgent hotbed of Baquba, north of Baghdad, the military said. A

suicide car bomb hit an American forward operating base near Iraq's border with Jordan on Friday, killing two US service members, the US command said Saturday. A Marine spokesman said the attack had been directed at members of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

Iraq closed its Karamah border crossing into Jordan until further notice, Jordanian officials said yesterday.

Threat

FROM PAGE 12

The Bandarban Betar Kendra, established at a cost of Tk20 crore, has been transmitting programmes experimentally from 12:00noon to 2:00pm every day.

It was suspected that communications over powerful walkie-talkies used by the miscreants in the hill areas were interrupted by the radio transmission system.

According to the sources, "miscreants" have been threatening to loot the transmission machine for a week making phone call to the residence of Regional Director Mustafizur Rahman.

The higher authorities, including the deputy commissioner and police superintendent, were informed of the matter. Police Superintendent Iqbal Bahar and other police officials have visited the radio centre.

Six policemen are now on duty at the radio centre. "They are not sufficient for guarding all sentry posts of the centre," said one of the officials.

Date with death

FROM PAGE 1

admitted being 'helpless' about the situation. The Minister for Communication, Nazmul Huda told The Daily Star that lack of enforcement of the existing laws is the main cause behind the 'undesirable situation' on the roads.

"When the police stop a vehicle on the road, we all know it is not for implementing the laws but to do other things. We cannot expect any discipline on the roads unless the law enforcers start doing their jobs properly," said Nazmul Huda.

"Time and again road safety issues have been discussed and many directives have been sent out to the police and the local administrations across the country but unfortunately nothing has changed," the communications minister said.

In fact, the country's 20,800 kilometres of highways are fraught with anarchic and dangerous conditions at any time of the day. Nighttime driving poses the most danger, with most vehicles, particularly trucks and buses having no control switches for their beams. In addition, many drivers do not care to lower beams for oncoming vehicles, and thousands of trucks have fitted their vehicles with additional lights that virtually blind the drivers of oncoming vehicles. There are also hundreds of vehicles with only one light.

While the official speed limit has been set at 60 kilometres per hour, buses, trucks and other vehicles willfully defy the speed limit. According to a top official of the Ministry of Communication, there is no recorded instance in the country of a driver being booked for reckless driving. He said that prosecution only takes place when the driver has had a fatal accident.

BRTA officials admitted that more than ninety percent of the drivers' licences in the country are fake. At the BRTA office in Mirpur ganges of youths openly operate and 'sell' driving licences. Most drivers are ignorant of road signs and try to overtake other vehicles on dangerous bends, risking not only the lives of their own passengers but also others using the same road.

According to an investigation by The Daily Star, transport companies also force their drivers to engage in reckless driving by creating timetables for arrival that require their drivers to rush. For instance, most transport companies in Dhaka promise to take passengers to Rajshahi, 270 kilometres away, in four and a half hours. This means that the driver has to maintain an average speed of 60 kilometres per hour. Considering human activities, such as bazaars and non-mechanised vehicles on our national roads, it is impossible to maintain such an average speed unless the driver takes huge risks by speeding whenever he can.

And most of the 63,381 buses and minibuses plying on the national roads do invariably take risks. Interestingly, all leading transport companies in Dhaka promise to take passengers to Chittagong, 264 kilometres away, in four hours. Here the driver is expected to maintain an average speed of more than 60 kilometres per hour -- a blatant violation of the official speed limit.

Most of the country's 51,375 trucks are old and unfit for roads, BRTA sources said, adding that these trucks are invariably overloaded and therefore break down more often. Chairman of the BRTA, Faruque Ahmed said that they have even discovered that some garages rent out new tyres, lights and other parts to vehicle owners just before the vehicles are brought into the BRTA office for fitness certificates.

Four years ago the government borrowed Tk44 crore from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and completed building five computerised Vehicle Inspection Centres (VIC) in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. Since 2001 the five VICs are lying idle for mysterious reasons. According to BRTA sources, vested groups operating in the BRTA and in the transport sector are preventing the authorities from starting the VICs, which if operated, would disqualify thousands of faulty vehicles from plying our roads. BRTA officials however said that they were again trying to start the VICs with another loan of Tk two crore from the ADB.

One of the most dangerous elements on our roads is the existence of humps or speed breakers that lack any warning signs or markings. Local people, trying to prevent speeding through their towns or villages often set up these unauthorised humps. Any

road user not familiar with the road faces risks of a serious accident.

In numerous small villages and towns along the highways the Roads and Highways Department has built concrete walls on both sides of the road to make 'bus bays.' The walls separate the local traffic from the main road and also make separate room for loading and unloading of local buses, with the idea of keeping the main road free. But total lack of enforcement has encouraged grabbers. Now shops have been set up in the R&HD's 'bus bays,' some used for rickshaw and tempo parking and some for truck terminals. Local buses load and unload on the narrow highway, blocking the main thoroughfare. The Chief Engineer of the R&HD, SK Rabul Islam however denied having any knowledge about such 'bus bays' saying, "I will have to inquire with my offices before commenting on it."

The HC Registrar's Office had earlier sent letters to The Daily Star and Bhorer Kagoj asking for detailed information about their reports. The two dailies responded to that on November 27 and 28.

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