

Saifur's last Sylhet visit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Saifur Friday made his last visit to Sylhet where he went to college and competed in parliamentary elections of 1996, 2001 and 2008.

Saifur Rahman spent a few hours in Sylhet for the first time in eight months. A little sick, Saifur told his party workers and leaders that day, "Although I am not in the government or have been elected, I would always work for the development of this region."

He offered his Juma prayers at the city's Bandarabazar Jame Masjid and exchanged views with devotees. He donated Tk 1 lakh and 500 bags of cement to the mosque. "We had donated Tk 1 crore for the mosque when we were in power," Saifur had said.

Expressing his desire to spend the coming Eid in

Sylhet, the former finance minister while talking to party activists and newsmen at Sylhet Circuit House said "Sylhet is my last address".

He refused to comment on issues of Sylhet BNP and said BNP is in a crisis nationally.

"We had done a lot when we were in power. However, many of the development projects remained incomplete. We request the people concerned to complete those," he said.

Saifur offered feteiha at the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shahporan (RA) in Sylhet before leaving Sylhet for his village home in Moulvibazar in the afternoon.

In 1996 he lost the parliamentary polls in Sylhet to Humayun Rashid Chowdhury and in 2008 to his classmate and now Finance Minister AMA Muhith. Saifur won in 2001 beating Muhith.

Depression

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likely to move in a northwesterly direction."

The 14 districts include Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Bhola, Patuakhali, Barisal, Chandpur, Barguna, Pirojpur, Jhalakati, Bagerhat, Khulna and Satkhira.

Reports received from our Cox's Bazar correspondent said four trawlers caught in a storm sank near the coast early yesterday. Sixty-four fishermen in the trawlers were rescued. But more than 500 fishermen in 30 other trawlers remained missing.

Trawler owners said at least 12 trawlers with around 200 fishermen on board are floating in deep sea with their fuel exhausted.

The Met Office said under the influence of the monsoon depression squally weather may continue to affect the maritime ports and adjoining coastal regions of Bangladesh.

Maximum sustained wind speed within 48 km of the depression centre is about 50 kph rising to 60 kph in gusts or squalls. Sea will remain rough.

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to keep hoisted local cautionary signal number three.

All fishing boats and trawlers over north Bay have been advised to remain in shelter till further notice.

Our correspondent in Cox's Bazar reports: Trawler owners said a trawler capsized

in Moheshkhali channel around 2:30 am. Another trawler sank at Nazirtek channel at about the same time. Three other trawlers rescued 34 fishermen of the two trawlers while they were floating.

Another 23 fishermen swam ashore when their trawlers sank near Saint Martin's Island, and Baharchhara of Teknaf.

Convener of Cox's Bazar Boat Owners Association Mujibur Rahman said they have opened a control room at Nuniachhara fishery ghat in the town, and were searching for the 30 missing fishing boats with more than 500 fishermen.

During a visit to the fishery ghat, it was found that several thousand trawlers took shelter in Bakhali river after getting signals about the depression.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna adds: Heavy downpour accompanied by gusty wind for the whole day disrupted life in the city yesterday.

Most of the city areas, particularly low lying ones, were inundated. Road communications have been disrupted.

Unloading of imported cargo from the lone foreign ship at Mongla port could not be carried due to the inclement weather.

Wind was blowing at a speed of 40 to 50 km per hour in the city and elsewhere in the district.

Safety still missing

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to lack of safety measures in cuttingship, he added.

Around six months ago, the High Court ordered the government to close the operations of all ship-breaking yards running without environmental clearances within two weeks. The court also directed the shipyard authorities to ensure safe working conditions for the workers.

None of the 36 ship-breaking yards, which were identified as category Red (extremely dangerous), had taken or applied for environmental clearance from the government, revealed a report submitted to the court by the Department of Environment.

The HC considering the country's environmental degradation had also ordered that no ship would enter Bangladesh territory for breaking without cleaning its hazardous materials at source outside the territory.

Later the shipyard owners appealed to the court to have time to take necessary measures and be in compliance with the law.

The yards keep on breaking ships without environmental department clearances as the issue has been stuck in a legal tangle.

Some 30,000 workers are engaged in ship scrapping in Chittagong's Sitakunda, which houses the world's second largest ship-breaking industry after China. At least 250,000 people in the country live off the industry directly and indirectly, according to experts.

A report of a survey conducted by two internationally reputed organisations, Greenpeace and International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), says on average at least one worker

is injured a day and one dies a week.

The report styled "The Human Cost of Breaking Ships" published last December simultaneously from Bangladesh, India and Switzerland says at least 1,000 workers died in the last 20 years in Bangladesh's ship-breaking yards. The figures do not include the deaths from diseases caused by toxic fumes and materials workers are exposed to all the time.

Globally some 700 ships are scrapped a year, mainly in five countries -- China, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Vietnam -- and some in Turkey too, says a Greenpeace source.

With the global fleet growing fast, from 15,000 ships in the 1960s to 62,000 in 2000, and with the ships built before 1970 being sorted out for decommissioning, the number of ships to be condemned for scrapping will also rise in future.

Bank robbery

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Upazila in Patuakhali district and Faruk Hossain, 35, of Bhadraban village under Shibchar upazila in Madaripur district.

All of them were sent to jail custody on yesterday.

Police said the gang entered the bank through a back window having failed in their first attempt through the main gate. The robbers tried to open the vault using sophisticated equipments. But police of nearby station and local people encircled the bank after its night guard sought help hearing a noise from inside.

Saifur Rahman, manager of that branch, said Tk 2.75 lakh was in the vault as closing balance.

A case was filed with Sadullapur police station.

1932-2009

FROM PAGE 1
Fazlul Haq Muslim Hall at DU.

He was president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh, principal of Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, and president of Bangladesh Jatishangha Samiti.

In the late 70s, he joined Jatiyatabadi Gonotatrick Dal, the political party founded and later changed into BNP by late president Ziaur Rahman.

Saifur was elected to parliament first in 1979 and then in 1996 and 2001.

He served as finance and planning minister for three terms--1976-1982, 1991-1996 and 2001-2006.

He had drawn up and tabled a record 12 national budgets since independence.

As an elected governor, he presided over the golden jubilee conference of World Bank and IMF in Madrid in 1994.

He was awarded Ekushey Padakin 2005 for his role in the Language Movement.

Procurement

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worth, for example, around Tk 12 lakh, the service provider has to show an annual turnover of a past contract worth the same amount. But the amended PPR relaxes this condition, giving chance to a contractor seeking a Tk 12 lakh bid to qualify for the job by showing a turnover of Tk 5 lakh.

The rules also allow a contractor to qualify for a job worth Tk 10 lakh with an experience of just one such work instead of an experience of 10 years.

Earlier, a contractor could not purchase more than Tk 20-30 lakh a year after a natural disaster. Now a government entity can procure up to Tk 50 lakh in each case with the highest purchase ceiling fixed at Tk 5 crore.

The ceiling for most urgent purchases has been set at Tk 1 lakh to Tk 5 lakh instead of the previous Tk 50,000 to Tk 1 lakh.

The limits of Tk 1 lakh and Tk 5 lakh for purchases under quotation in the revenue budget have been revised to Tk 2 lakh and Tk 20 lakh while the limits in the development budget have been increased to Tk 5 lakh and Tk 40 lakh from Tk 2 lakh and Tk 10 lakh.

The purchase ceiling under limited tender has been fixed at Tk 25-50 lakh from Tk 15-30 lakh.

The timeframe of floating tender for work up to Tk 2 crore has been reduced to 14 days from 21 days.

The amended procurement rules have also a provision for a fee or honorarium for the members of the committee to open the tender.

The amendment to the PPR also covers a good number of other issues.

3 killed

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As per his statement, Rab and police took him to an abandoned hospital at Hatidanga village in Koira upazila to recover arms on the night.

When the law-enforcers reached the village, the associates of Akkas opened fire on them triggering a gunfight.

Akkas was caught in the line of fire while trying to flee and died on the spot, police said.

They said two police and two Rab men were also injured during the gunfight. Two guns and six bullets were recovered from the spot.

In Kushtia, acting on a tip-off police raided Kaya Child Heaven School where a group of Gano Bahini men were holding a meeting at about 4:30am yesterday.

Sensing the presence of police, the outlaws opened fire at them prompting them to fire back. At one stage, the outlaws managed to flee the scene.

Police later found the body of Murad lying on the ground. Police recovered a shutter gun and two bullets from the spot.

According to police, Murad was accused in 11 cases, including six for murder.

Our Pabna correspondent says: Police raided Shimulchhara area in Sadar upazila after receiving information that the outlaws of Janajuddha were holding a meeting there early yesterday.

As soon as they reached Shimulchhara around 2:00am, the outlaws started firing at the law enforcers forcing them to retaliate.

Hasan, wanted in a number of cases, was killed during the gunfight, police said.

He was also a convicted fugitive sentenced to 32 years' imprisonment in a murder case, police added.

Saifur dies

FROM PAGE 1
his way to Dhaka from Moulvibazar when the accident occurred.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel recovered the body and sent it to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital. On-duty doctors at the hospital said Saifur Rahman drowned following the accident.

Jeep driver Siraj and three other people accompanying Saifur--his personal secretary AGM Shamsul Haque, and two aides Sajib and Md Sharif--were also injured in the accident. They were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital.

Immediately after the accident, Rab-9 members rushed to the spot and smashed the windpanes of the jeep, fallen in the five-foot deep water of the ditch, to rescue Saifur and others.

"Saifur Rahman had his seat belt fastened. It took 10-12 minutes to get him out of the water by breaking the door of the car and cutting the seat belt," local Awami League (AL) lawmaker Lutful Hai Sachchu told newsmen.

"Saifur died on the spot," said Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital doctor Tofail Ahmed. Thousands of people, including local leaders of different political parties, thronged the hospital after hearing the news of his death.

An accountant by profession, a partner in the firm of Rahman Rahman Huq, the veteran politician placed 12 national budgets as finance minister.

His son Kaiser Rahman received his body at 5:00pm. Earlier, the body draped in the national flag lay in state at local Mukto Mancha. Additional police forces were deployed in the town to tackle huge crowd.

AL lawmaker Lutful Hai Sachchu, BNP leader and ex-state minister Harunur Rashid, Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner Hailu Kaiyum, Superintendent of Police Mukhlesur Rahman and Civil Surgeon Dr Nurul Amin, among others, rushed to the hospital.

His body was brought to his Gulshan residence in the capital at 8:00pm. BNP leaders, supporters and workers

gathered there to have a glimpse of the late leader.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojahid, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu were among the senior leaders of different political parties who paid their last respects to Saifur at his house in the evening.

Intense emotional moments followed Khaleda's arrival at her former cabinet colleague's residence at 8:45pm. The bereaved family gathered around her as she tried to offer them comfort.

Our Moulvibazar correspondent said the jeep of Saifur Rahman hit the stairs of his relative's house and was damaged slightly when he was ready to board the vehicle for going to Dhaka at about 11:30am.

Seeing this, his cousin and other relatives present there requested him not to go to Dhaka yesterday, as it is a bad sign for journey. But Saifur told them that he was sick and must go to Dhaka. He repeatedly sought doa from all before leaving the house.

Earlier, he offered Feteiha at the graveyard of his wife. As he was ill, he did not perform fasting yesterday. He took egg fry and bread at the house of his relative Badrul Alam before departure.

Minu, Saifur's sister-in-law, said this to the reporters.

FUNERAL
Saifur will be buried tomorrow at Paharmordan in Moulvibazar Sadar Upazila following his funerals in the capital and at his native place, reports UNB.

The first Namaj-e-Janaza for him will be held at Gulshan Azad Mosque at 11:00am, at BNP central office at 12:30pm and at Parliament plaza after Zohr prayers today.

His Janaza will also be held at Shahi Eidgah Maidan in Sylhet at 1:00pm tomorrow and at Moulvibazar Government High School compound later in the day before his burial.

VGF bid at stake

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Earlier, local people brought out a procession in the area as Babul drew the rice against 18 VGF cards that he managed by using party influence.

On Wednesday morning, VGF cardholders brought out a demonstrated against distribution of 20 metric tons of rotten rice among the beneficiaries and laid siege to Harinakundo Municipality and Harinakundo Upazila UNO office in Jhenidah. A case was filed with Harinakundo police station against No-3 ward councillor and poura BNP leader Anisur Rahman.

When contacted, Harinakundo municipality mayor Bulbul Aktar said quality rice was delivered to Anisur Rahman for distribution among the cardholders but he distributed rotten rice. She filed a case with Harinakundo police station against Rahman who went into hiding after the incident.

In Moulvibazar, name of Rajnagar upazila AL General Secretary Md Askar Khan was entered in the list of VGF cardholders as disabled and distressed. Besides, name of a Saudi Arab returnee Md Sufi Miah was also included. The AL leader later withdrew his name from the list.

Abdul Hye Khan, project implementation officer (PIO) in Rajnagar upazila, said, name of the AL leader was put on the list as he has 'hearing disability'. "It is up to him whether he will take VGF rice or not."

Due to hindrances caused by the ruling party activists, some 2,000 cardholders of different wards in Cox's Bazar could not receive VGF rice.

A few days ago, Cox's Bazar Municipality Mayor Sarwar Kamal at a press briefing said the municipality authorities would be compelled to withdraw itself from VGF rice distribution unless such meddling is stopped.

It is alleged that though people recommended by the AL city unit of Cox's Bazar, were listed as eligible for the VGF card, some ward-level leaders of the ruling party are not satisfied with the list.

Govt moves

FROM PAGE 1
Director General of the Directorate General of Health Services Shah Monir Hossain yesterday.

While talking to the press he also said that patients suffering from flu-like illness would be divided into three categories.

The patients under A category need only symptomatic treatment. If they don't recover by three days then they will fall under B category and be provided with anti-viral drug. If the patients develop respiratory complications then they will immediately be hospitalised under C category, he added.

Since June 18 around 281 patients have been detected with swine flu. But the trend is now static, he said.

On the issue of availability of the anti-viral drugs in the market Shah Monir Hossain said that a decision would be taken tomorrow whether the drugs would be made available in local pharmacies or in the outlets of the drug companies.

The health ministry, on Thursday, decided to make the anti-viral drug available in the market. The anti-viral drugs have already been sent to all the district and medical college hospitals to be given to

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Screening

FROM PAGE 1
place in the area where more than a thousand transport-workers stay together for days. They seem quite oblivious of swine flu and do not bother wearing masks.

The Upazila Health Complex is 10 kilometres away from the Benapole port.

Sharsha Upazila Health Officer Nazmul Ahsan said the two medical assistants check the passengers coming from India and it doesn't require equipment. If they trace out anyone with flu-like illness they would report it to Dhaka.

"There is nothing to panic," he further said, adding that there is enough stock of anti-viral drugs for the swine flu patients.

Some 5,000 truckers and helpers check in the country through Hill land port of Panchagarh and Shona Masjid of Chapainawabganj without any checking, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

Md Abdur Rahman Liton, general secretary of Hill Clearing & Forwarding Agents Association alleged that strict preventive measures are yet to be taken by the district health officials. He mentioned that no truckers and helpers of the port use mask.

The port sources said such lacking may lead to shutting of the port operation any time, if the disease spreads beyond control.

Sources said with no testing equipment, two health officers and a pharmacist assigned at Hill, Shona Masjid and Banglabandha are just asking few questions to the visitors and letting them go. Although about four months ago, two people have been trained for each district with a view to containing the epidemic flu.

The district administration officials also said there is no preparation to deal with the flu threat effectively as they do not have sufficient space to isolate the infected.

Contacted, the Civil Surgeon of Dinajpur Motiar Rahman said they have taken effective measures at the port area and no patient has been detected in the district yet.

Jinnah book

FROM PAGE 16
Main opposition party, the BJP. The party subsequently expelled him.

But two social activists from Gujarat challenged the ban in court.

The state government said it had banned the book for "defamatory references" to India's first home minister.

India's first home minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, is a political icon in his home state of Gujarat.

While banning the book last month, the Gujarat government had said that Singh's book Jinnah: India-Partition-Independence was "objectionable, misleading and against public tranquility".

15 tourists

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Minister Gordana Jankulovska told reporters. "Fifteen perished, four seriously injured were taken to hospital in Ohrid and about 50 survivors are at a local hotel."

The captain of the Iliden was among the dead, Jankulovska said, adding that the vessel was carrying "a group of Bulgarian tourists and their Macedonian guide".

The death toll was liable to rise as search efforts continued.

Bulgaria's interim ambassador to Macedonia, Angel Angelov, said at least six of the dead were Bulgarian nationals, Bulgarian radio reported earlier Saturday. A Bulgarian aircraft was dispatched to Ohrid to fly survivors home.

Built in Germany in 1924, the Iliden was in good condition, with an operating permit, and insured with Lloyd's of London through 2010, Transport Minister Mile Janakievski said.

It had a capacity of 53 passengers, he added.

Gerard Buittat, a Frenchman who trains police officers in Kosovo under a European Union programme, and who was paying a visit to the region, told AFP he saw the boat go down in less than a minute.

Whilst driving from Ohrid towards the Albanian border, he said, "I saw a boat filled with tourists which, for some unexplained reason, veered like an outboard motor boat to the right and then immediately fell onto its side."

"I got out my camera and took a photo of the boat when it was still on its side," Buittat said. "In the time it took for me to get out of my car, in the space of 30 seconds, it sank."

Residents at the campground 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) south of Ohrid used small boats to go out onto the lake and pluck survivors to safety, witnesses said. The emergency services came soon after to join them.

Macedonian President George Ivanov, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and the interior, transport, defence and health ministers all dashed to the scene, ahead of an emergency meeting of the government in the evening.

Janakievski said that, for "ethical reasons", he was tendering his resignation as transport minister.

PM tells of threats

FROM PAGE 1
Sheikh Hasina, in the presence of several hundred expatriates from all over Europe, said the government has taken charge of such a country, which has been ruined by the rulers of last seven years.

"After a long time, people have elected their own government. I am confident that we will be able to change the fate of the country's people, because we have honesty and sincerity. Our government needs your help in implementing its roadmap for turning the present Bangladesh into a developed and prosperous one," she told the Bangladeshis abroad.

The prime minister deplored that the BNP-Jamaat government and the last caretaker government had stalled the pace of development of Bangladesh though the previous Awami League government (1996-2001) had taken the country on the track of development through modern planning and proper implementation that led to increase in literacy rate, power generation and ensuring food security of the people.

She observed that the BNP-Jamaat government had politicised the administration rampantly while the caretaker government panicked people in the administration through its various "aggressive activities".

"Now the situation is such that many government officials feel insecure even to do a good work. But I have told them to work without any fear. The present government wants to free the administration from politicisation and ensure job satisfaction of the government employees," she said.

Hasina also recalled her days in sub-jail during the caretaker government and how she was forced not to come home when she was in the United States of America at the time, when there was a crackdown launched on the political arena following the 1/11 changeover.

"I came abroad accompanying my expecting daughter and ailing daughter-in-law. At that time, I came to know that a murder case had been filed and arrest warrant issued against me in Bangladesh. I decided to return to Bangladesh without delay. But the caretaker rulers threatened to shoot me on sight at Dhaka Airport," she said.

"They (caretaker government) also had threatened me that if I came home, they would take me to such a 'place' where from I would never return. I didn't care. Because I knew that the people are with me," she told her audience in this diplomatic Swiss city.

Sheikh Hasina categorically said she is afraid of none but Allah the Almighty as the only aim of her politics is people's welfare.

"I do politics for the people. Had I known that every person of Bangladesh were literate, they have accommodation, have health services, there is no scarcity of food, I would have quit politics," she said.

Hasina further mentioned that an adviser of the caretaker government even dared to offer her that she would be the prime minister of Bangladesh had she agreed that there would be no elections in the country.

"I told the adviser that only people will decide my fate," she said, making the disclosure on the post-1/11 episodes in the country's political arena.

In this context, Sheikh Hasina expressed her gratitude to the Bangladeshis expatriates for their contribution behind her release and restoration of democracy in Bangladesh through the December 29 polls.

She said the present government has been able to bring back an environment of confidence among the people.

"Just after assuming office, we have been able to bring the prices of essentials, including rice, within the buying capacity of the commoners. Though the prices of some Ramadan items have increased slightly, but these could not destabilise the market," the prime minister said.

Hasina said her government wants to build Bangladesh as the most peaceful nation in the South Asian region. She emphatically said that the soil of Bangladesh won't be allowed to be used for any type of terrorism and militancy.

She also mentioned that the present government has taken various stern steps to stop extortion as it is firm on its resolve to curb all social menaces.

Regarding the world economic meltdown, she said a financial flu could not affect Bangladesh because of different steps taken by her government to offset its fallout.

Sheikh Hasina told her audience that her government has planned to create a skilled manpower by providing