

Saiful came to Dhaka a week ago 'looking for job'

DPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Saying he would look for a job, Saiful Islam of Nayakathi village in Khulna's Dumuria upazila went to Dhaka just a week ago. His family had been out of contact with him since Saturday as his phone was switched off.

Locals and family members said the 24-year-old was a political science student at Government BIJ College, Khulna. He studied at Ullah Mojida in Madrasa in the upazila and passed Dakhlil exams in 2011.

Two years later, he completed Kamil from Khulna Alia Madrasa. He got admitted to BL College in 2014.

Some villagers said the family of Saiful, who died in the capital during an anti-terror drive yesterday, has been contacted by the police.

Habib Hossain, officer-in-charge of Dumuria Police Station, said Saiful's father Abdul Khayer Molla is the treasurer of Sahas union unit Jamaat.

Visiting Nayakathi village, around 26 km off Khulna city, yesterday, this

correspondent saw a huge crowd of people at Saiful's house. After watching the news of his death on television, villagers and journalists gathered there.

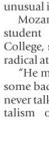
His father is the imam of a local mosque and also an assistant of a marriage register. His mother Asma Begum is a speech-impaired person.

His two younger sisters, Irani and Tamanna, are students of a local madrasa. They were crying over the news of their brother's death.

Haidar Ali, a villager, told The Daily Star that Saiful was an introvert. He hardly came outside of home. The villagers didn't notice anything unusual in his behaviour.

Mozammel Hawlader, a fourth-year student of political science at BL College, said he also didn't notice any radical attitude in Saiful.

He might have come in touch with some bad people very recently. He had never talked with me about fundamentalism or militant activities," said



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Terror attack plan foiled

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He studied in a madrasa and was a member of Jamaat and was once involved with Islami Chhatra Shibir, a pro-Jamaat student body, according to police.

His father, imam of a local mosque, was also involved in Jamaat politics, officials said.

Saiful, 30, so far 69 suspected militants either died in police shooting or blew themselves up by detonating suicide vests during at least 22 anti-terror drives across the country since the Gulshan café attack on July 1 last year. Besides, around 150 got arrested.

During yesterday's seven-hour operation codenamed "August Bite" starting at 4:00am, Saiful's "blasted two bombs" while members of the bomb disposal unit of the DMP defused three others at the hotel, police say.

"The bombs were powerful," Monirul said after a post-operation briefing on the spot around 12:30pm.

The terror plot also targeted world headlines and a boost to the militant group that has been nearly crushed following different successful anti-terror operations, he added.

Monirul said they had some indistinct intelligence that "Neo JMB" had planned to carry out a massive attack on the death anniversary of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a huge number of people gathered at a Dhamundi 32 on the occasion.

While working on the information, police came to know that one of the main militants was in the surrounding area, and they conducted block raids for the last few days.

During a raid yesterday, police knocked all the rooms of Hotel Olio International at Panthapath. Guests were taken to a nearby hotel on the third floor of the four-storey building, opened the door, police said.

"Arousing suspicion, he [the guest] said he would not open the door before dawn," Monirul said.

Law enforcers saw through a window a bag and some electric wires and padlocked the door.

Soon SWAT and the bomb disposal unit reached the spot.

Monirul said they repeatedly requested Saiful to surrender but he did not. At one stage, SWAT decided to launch the operation.

"When SWAT members marched towards the door constantly firing gunsshots and tearing canisters into the room, Saiful blasted a bomb."

As the door collapsed, Saiful came out with another bomb and tried to detonate it. SWAT members continued firing and the bomb went off, Monirul added.

Ferozur Rahman Olio, owner of the building, said he recently rented the hotel out to one of his acquaintances named Nurul Islam.

Quoting the hotel manager, Ferozur said Saiful had submitted all the necessary papers to book the room at Tk 800 per night, before checking in three days earlier. The room is a corner.

Asked if there is any CCTV installed at the hotel, Ferozur said, "The CCTV is not active right now, but it was working earlier."

EXPLOSION AND DAMAGE

There was a huge explosion at 9:44am following the firing of two gas canisters. It filled the area with smoke and then shooting continued for at least 15 seconds.

After a pause of a couple of minutes, gunshots were heard for several seconds. Then there was calm until a bomb recovered from the spot was defused around 11:45am.

Journalists were kept around 100 yards off the hotel.

After police relaxed the security, visiting the spot it was seen that a portion of the third floor of the hotel was blown away, while brick chunks, shattered glasses and pieces of window grills were scattered on the floor.

Bullet marks and blood stains were seen on the wall. The wooden doors and glass windows of two to three rooms, including No 301, were damaged. Furniture and beddings were thrown out onto the street.

A black handbag was found tattered on the road, police say it was for carrying the bomb that was exploded first.

The impact of the explosion created cracks on an adjacent building.

A pedestrian who was at an alley close by got injured in the blast. He took treatment at Square Hospital.

The body of the suspected militant, as seen in the pictures circulated by law enforcers, apparently was not burnt and hit with bullets. There is no sign of mutilation as seen in other suicide bombings in different hideouts.

There was a wave of panic in the adjacent areas with police restricting movement from Green Road to Russell Square.

Several security guards of nearby Square Hospital said they locked all gates of the hospital early morning knowing about a possible raid.

Ramjan Ali, who works at Monami International's warehouse just opposite the hotel, said rubble flying after the blast even fell on their tin-shed structure.

Briefing journalists at the spot, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque said Saiful was involved with Shibir during his student days.

The IGP added that if Saiful was not involved with Jamaat-Shibir, he would not have planned an attack the day the country is mourning Bangladesh.

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Akhter, 9, and Tazul Islam, 5.

But lack of food isn't the only prevailing problem as Ahlimma Begum from Kurigram shows.

Aklma, 45, hailing from North Naobash village in Kurigram, who took shelter in Arajhi Bhogdanga Government Primary School six days ago, said they were facing problem as they did not have any cooking arrangement.

"My husband collected rice but we aren't able to cook it. Like us, some families are living with our cattle here. But there is no fodder for the cattle," Ahlimma said.

Our correspondents from different flood hit northern districts including Kurigram, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon, Gaibandha, Dinajpur, Jamalpur report increasingly worsening conditions.

The sufferings of flood affected people living in remote areas are perhaps the most alarming.

Visiting Chinaludi union by boat, our Jamalpur correspondent said that around 300 families from Paschim Banna, Purbho Banna and Dakshin Gilabari villages of the union, along with their cows and goats, taking shelter on the Paschim Banna dirt road for four days.

Farmer Samsul, 60, of Dakshin Gilabari, Hasna Amirion, Hava Bibi and Parul of Paschim Banna village, all told our district correspondent that they had been surviving merely on purified rice.

"No one has yet come to us with relief materials", they alleged, adding, "If the situation prevails, we will soon starve after our stocks of dry food run out."

Fajal Mia, 70, Razzak, 35 and Majjar Bewa, 50 of Faijamiar village of the union, echoed the sentiment.

In Dinajpur, our correspondent, while visiting shelters in Dinajpur, Sadar, Chirribandar and Biral upazila, noted that the affected people are getting food, but not enough to meet their daily demand. There was also an acute shortage of drinking water as water sources, including tube wells, all went under floodwater.

Around 3,000 people in 13 upazilas have been affected by the flood. People are even facing problems during burial and cremation.

About 13 lakh people making up five lakh families were affected as the flood situation deteriorated in Kurigram, Gaibandha, Bogra and Sirajganj during the past 24 hours



Afloat on a raft, Abdul Halim and his mother Helena look for a dry spot to cook a meal. They had to leave their home at Paschim Banna village in Jamalpur's Ismailpur upazila as floodwater entered their place. All seven upazilas of the district have been hit by flood since Friday. Inset, in a flood shelter set up in a classroom, Rehana Parvin prepares food yesterday. The 34-year-old along with her family moved to the shelter at Kathalbari High School in Kurigram's Shibirgunj village on Monday, hours after the Kurigram town protection emblem gave way at different places, flooding Kurigram Sadar upazila. PHOTO: ABM AMINUL ISLAM, ABDUL WAHED



Crises of food, drinking water worsen misery

with improvements seen in Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Rangpur and Lalmonirhat districts.

Divisional Commissioner Kazi Hasan Ahmed said relief activities have been intensified further and members of Bangladesh Army, Border Guard Bangladesh and Fire Service are assisting the civil administration and authorities in tackling the situation, reported BSS yesterday.

FLOODWATER'S RISE AND FALL

Floodwater continues receding in Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Rangpur and Lalmonirhat district. However, as the water barrels down from upstream, new areas in the central part of the country are being affected.

The water of the river Jamuna has increased by 37 centimetres at Aricha point under Shibalaya upazila in Manikganj in the last 24 hours, reports our Manikganj correspondent, citing officials from the Water Development board.

Different places on the banks of the river Jamuna and new areas, along with croplands, have also gone under flood. Thousands of people in these

areas have become marooned after floods damaged roads and dams.

"The water level of the Jamuna river remains steady while water from other small rivers in the northern region show a falling trend. So if the fresh deluge does not start upstream, the situation may start improving from day after tomorrow," said Sazzad Hossain, executive engineer of Bangladesh Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre.

Though the water level of the Ganges was increasing, Sazzad Hossain said, it had not yet crossed the danger mark.

Currently, water levels at 56 river stations monitored by the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre have seen a marked rise while 32 stations recorded fall and thirty are above danger level.

FOUR DROWN IN FLOODWATER

Four more people drowned in floodwater in Dinajpur on Tuesday.

They were Abtubar Rahman, 55, of Parbatipur, Humayun Kabir, 16, Malla Murmu, 59 of Dinajpur Sadar upazila and Masudur Rahman, 15, of Biral upazila.

A total of 24 people were killed in the last 3 days in different districts.

CJ says 'big shots' were involved

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blocked by a law of the state [indemnity ordinance]. As a member of the judiciary, I feel proud because the Supreme Court cleared the way for holding the trial by scrapping the indemnity ordinance.

"There was a deep conspiracy in this case. When I was a junior judge of the Appellate Division [of the SC], I was sick. I was being treated for cancer in Singapore. At that time, there were problems with the constitutionality of the bench that I had heard the case. I was requested to come back home soon. Even though I was not sure whether I would survive, I returned home with this."

"Today is a shocking day in our history. On this day, the people of Bangladesh lost the architect of independence... the killers wanted to eliminate my belief."

The CJ mentioned that the founding fathers of two nations in this subcontinent were assassinated -- one is Mahatma Gandhi and the other is Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

But the reasons behind the killing of the two great leaders are different. Mahatma Gandhi was killed out of extreme communalism and blind faith, noted Sinha.

Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah, senior-most judge of the SC, said, "Bangabandhu is the Father of the Nation. There is no question about this."

"I was a student of BA when the election was held in 1970. There was no leader other than Bangabandhu in East Pakistan and nobody could even imagine anyone else... all were

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under the leadership of one leader [Bangabandhu]."

He further said, "It was because of him that Bangladesh was liberated. It was because of him that I could be a judge of the apex court... We remember Bangabandhu as we are citizens of an independent country."

After inaugurating the programme, the CJ told reporters that he wouldn't comment on criticism of the SC verdict in the 16th amendment case.

He, however, said he would talk on the issue in court.

Sabbir Faiz, additional registrar of the HC, told The Daily Star that more than 80 people, including two HC judges and some SC officials, donated blood at the programme.

No 'careless' comments

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Last year, the High Court declared the amendment illegal and the decision was upheld by the SC on July 3 this year. The apex court released the full verdict on Aug 1.

Since then, several AL leaders have been criticising the verdict and Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha over some observations made in it.

Food Minister Qamrul Islam even demanded the CJ's removal. Some other AL leaders called for expunging the observations.

The BNP, however, welcomed the verdict.

Anisul said, "We don't care what the BNP thinks about the verdict. We don't believe that those who break law frequently are respectful to it."

He claimed it was mentioned in the 16th amendment case verdict that Ziaur Rahman and HM Eshad had turned the country into a "Banana Republic".

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The Dutchman, who now works for a property development company in Inohor, was born Dennis Verbaas and adopted a Muslim name when he converted to Islam in 2015. He proposed to Tunku Aminah in December last year.

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Malaysian princess weds Dutchman

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Bahru. The private ceremony was attended by close family and friends.

The groom wore traditional white Malay wedding attire and the bride wore a white dress with Dennis Muhammad placing the ring on his bride's finger in a special room of the bride's palace and offering a dowry of around \$5, in line with centuries-old local customs.

An evening ceremony replete with pomp and tradition capped the festivities in the southern state of Inohor, with the couple sitting on an elaborately decorated dais as family members and dignitaries dropped petals into their hands and sprinkled them with scented water and yellow rice.

Among those offering their blessings to the couple in the "sitting in

state" ceremony -- traditionally the high point of a Malay wedding -- were the bride's father, Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, and Brunel's Sultan Hassanul Bolkiah.

The ceremony in the throne room of the Grand Palace was also attended by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Afterwards, the newlyweds made their first public appearance as man

and wife on the palace steps, smiling and waving to around 1,200 reception guests assembled in the garden.

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All pending hajj visa applications okayed

Says foreign ministry

BSS, Dhaka

The Saudi authorities have approved all pending applications of intending Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrims paving the way for them to perform the holy Islamic ritual, a Bangladesh foreign ministry statement said this evening.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like to inform that 118,924 pilgrims' visas have been approved by Saudi authorities as of 14 August 2017," the statement read.

"The Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Dhaka has informed that there is no pending application with them," it added.

The statement said Bangladesh's foreign ministry was also "closely working with the Saudi authorities in this regard".