



US-Bangla Airlines pilot Captain Abid Sultan with wife Afsana and son Tamjid in Sylhet.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK PAGE OF ABID

Last light out too

FROM PAGE 1

18, when she suffered a stroke.

After a brain surgery, she suffered a second stroke that night and had been on life support since then, relatives said.

"Tamjid came to the hospital around 10:30am after hearing that his mother died. But he didn't go to the third floor [where she was under treatment] to see her. He sat in a doctor's room on the first floor," said his uncle Kazi Shahinul Islam.

Tamjid, an O-level student, was sitting there as relatives were making arrangements for the funeral. At the

namaz-e-janaza at Gausul Azam mosque in Uttara, he did not speak a word, not even when relatives came to comfort him.

Relatives said Tamjid was sleeping beside his mother in their Uttara house when she suffered the stroke. He started screaming after getting no response from her in the morning. She was first taken to a hospital in Uttara and from there to the Neuroscience hospital.

Most of her organs stopped responding on Tuesday, relatives said.

Tamjid's father Abid Sultan, pilot of

the ill-fated US-Bangla flight BS 211, along with his three other cabin crew members died in the crash at Tribhuban International Airport in Kathmandu on March 12.

The flight took off from Dhaka with 32 Bangladeshis, 33 Nepalese, and one each from the Maldives and China on board.

At least 49 people, including 26 Bangladeshis, were killed when the plane, a 76-seater Bombardier Dash 8 Q-400, slammed on an empty field, caught fire, and came to a rest on a football pitch.

When the friend turns a foe

FROM PAGE 1

CIA sent Saddam to kill Qasim. But the attempt ended in a debacle as Saddam opened fire too soon on Qasim's car. A grenade thrown by one of his six commandos did not explode. Saddam had to flee to Tikrit, his home town, with the help of the CIA and Egyptian agents from where he slipped into Cairo. Here he lived in comfortable arrangements by the CIA and Egyptian security service.

But then in 1963, Qasim was killed in a coup of the Ba'ath party that enjoyed CIA's confidence. Saddam returned to Iraq and became the head of the secret intelligence apparatus to oversee the liquidation of communists in Iraq.

Saddam, still supported by the US, came to the threshold of power in 1968 as there was another coup in the Ba'ath party.

But soon the young dictator fell out of favour of the US as he started hobnobbing with the Soviets and himself appeared as a nationalist leader. His nationalisation of Iraqi oil in 1972 was a shock for the US. The US government soon leaned towards Iran under Mohammad Reza Shah. The Shah soon became the closest ally of the US in the Gulf.

The drama changed scene again when Ayatollah Khomeini seized power by ousting the Shah. The Islamic Republic of Iran became a foe of America.

It was then the US thought to befriend Saddam again and use him against Iran because an Islamist Ayatollah was a threat to both the US and Israel.

Documents from April 1981 declassified under the Freedom of Information Act and compiled by the National Security Archive show that the US finds "...a greater convergence of interests with Iran than any time since the revolution of 1958..." because of the common enemy Ayatollah.

The declassified documents reveal the US provided intelligence and satellite imagery to Saddam in his fight against Iran and also turned a blind eye to Saddam's use of chemical weapons including mustard and sarin gas against Iran and Kurds.

Not only that. As protests raged in US about Iraq's use of chemical weapons, US president Ronald Reagan's

then special Middle East envoy Donald H Rumsfeld who later became one of the main architects of Iraq invasion visited Baghdad in March 1984 with instructions to deliver a private message to Saddam. Declassified documents obtained by the National Security Archive in 2003 reveals that Rumsfeld was supposed to assure that public criticism of Iraq in US for using chemical weapons would not derail Washington's attempts to forge a better tie with Iraq.

At the height of this cooperation, Iran had found a gaping hole in the Iraqi defence in the winter of 1987 and prepared for a massive attack in spring of 1988 that would have surely gained it Basra.

But the US provided Saddam its intelligence and images of Iranian troop movement that revealed Iran's strategic goal. Saddam then launched a counteroffensive with mustard and sarin gas in early 1988 relying on US satellite intelligence.

Iran suffered badly and finally agreed to negotiate with Iraq.

Throughout the Iran-Iraq war, the US had firm evidence of Iraqi chemical attacks beginning from 1983, as the Foreign Policy magazine revealed. But it never supplied the evidence to Iran to get any resolution in the UN.

Declassified CIA documents now show senior US officials were being regularly informed about the scale of the nerve gas attacks. The US also knew the exact location of the chemical plants.

The US action was rationalised in the National Security Archive documents as "...the US, having decided that an Iranian victory would not serve its interests, began supporting Iraq." Measures were also taken to support Iraq such as removing Iraq from the US list of states supporting international terrorism in February 1982.

Iraq was now at a stage of pauperisation because of its long war with Iran and loans were provided to Iraq to pursue its war mission. The NSA says: "The White House and State Department pressured the Export-Import Bank to provide Iraq with financing, to enhance its credit standing and enable it to obtain loans from other international financial institutions. The U.S. Agriculture Department provided taxpayer-

guaranteed loans for purchases of American commodities, to the satisfaction of U.S. grain exporters."

As the war ended, Iraq found its economy completely destroyed. Its oil fields were yielding little output as investments fell and at the same time the world oil market was in a glut, causing a drop in oil price.

Meanwhile, Kuwait became a thorn in the side of Iraq. Saddam suspected Kuwait was using slant drilling to steal oil out of Iraqi fields. Moreover, Iraq still considered Kuwait as part of its own territory separated in 1922 by the British.

With his war machines ready, Saddam met US ambassador April Glaspie in July, 1990 to discuss his ambition. The ambassador made a vague comment that the US was not interested in regional border disputes although she made it clear that America is concerned by Saddam's troop mobilisation. Saddam took her comment as a consent to invade Kuwait which it did just a month later.

But Kuwaiti oil was "America's". During the US-British negotiations over control of Middle Eastern oil, as the Second World War was winding up in 1944, President Roosevelt told the British ambassador in Washington: "Persian oil is yours. We share the oil of Iraq and Kuwait. As for Saudi Arabian oil, it's ours."

So when Iraq invaded Kuwait for oil, Saddam automatically became a foe of the US. George Bush, backed by British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, imposed sanctions and mobilised an international coalition to oppose Iraq. Half a million US troops flew into Saudi Arabia in November 1990 and finally in January 1991, the US started its attack code-named Operation Desert Storm.

Since then Saddam could no more gain the friendship of the US. US policy made sure that it controlled the whole of Gulf oil by itself, and so in a way Saddam's fate was sealed. After the September 11, 2001 Twin Tower attack in New York, the Bush administration set out to dislodge Saddam as soon as possible and soon, the fable of Saddam's Weapons of Mass Destruction was invented.

Not afraid

FROM PAGE 16

property theft situation going on," Trump said as he signed the new trade order, which could include duties as high as 25 percent.

The action did not immediately impose any new tariffs, but within two weeks US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer is due to publish a list of the products that could be hit with tariffs.

US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross on Thursday suggested the new measures on intellectual property were a way of bringing Beijing to the table, telling CNBC they were "the prelude to a set of negotiations".

But a senior US official later said that Washington was "not interested in creating terms for a dialogue".

"We are interested in creating some motivation for China to actually take concrete actions to further open their markets to US exports," the official said on condition of anonymity, adding that the two sides are constantly talking.

China's commerce ministry warned that a 15 percent tariff on 120 goods worth almost \$1 billion -- including fresh fruit, nuts and wine -- would be imposed if the US fails to reach a "trade compensation agreement" within an unspecified timeframe.

In a second step, a 25 percent tariff would be imposed on eight goods totalling nearly \$2 billion, including pork and aluminium scrap, after "further evaluating the impact of the US measures on China", the statement said.

The measures were specifically in response to US steel and aluminium tariffs, which took effect yesterday.

The list noticeably does not include soybeans, a key US export from Trump-voting states that Chinese state-run newspaper the Global Times had suggested should be targeted by Beijing.

Betty Wang, an economist at ANZ bank, said China's reaction is "relatively mild".

"From China's perspective, it absolutely does not want to see a trade war. Coming back to the negotiation table is a relatively good result," Wang said.

YEARS OF FAILED DIALOGUE

US Vice President Mike Pence hailed the new measures, saying they made it clear "the era of economic surrender is over".

Senior White House economic advisor Everett Eissenstat said the new duties would target sectors where "China has sought to acquire an advantage through the unfair acquisition or forced technology transfer from US companies."

Lighthizer indicated the industries could include aerospace, maritime and rail transport equipment, and new energy vehicles.

The order also directs the US Treasury to develop new proposals to increase safeguards against Chinese investments in the US that could compromise national security.

In addition, the United States launched a challenge at the World Trade Organization yesterday, saying in a statement that China appears to be breaking WTO rules by denying foreign patent holders rights "to stop a Chinese entity from using the technology after a licensing contract ends".

The senior US official said Washington was "very optimistic" that allies such as Europe, Japan and Australia would join its WTO case.

White House officials said the actions came after years of efforts failed to convince China to change its behaviour.

While Trump hit out at China, he authorised the suspension of steel and aluminium tariffs on key trade partners -- including the European Union and six other countries -- until May 1. But the EU said it would "reserve its rights" to impose countermeasures as long as the exemption remained temporary.

PAIN FOR US CONSUMERS

The United States had a record \$375.2 billion goods trade deficit with China last year.

American industry, agriculture in particular, as well as members of the president's own Republican party have voiced strident opposition to his recent trade moves.

The US Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai said American companies face market access barriers in China but it said both sides should avoid a trade war.

Influential Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said he was "very pleased" with the moves, but other Republicans called on Trump to be judicious in designing the tariffs, warning of consequences for American consumers.

Pro-BNP panel

FROM PAGE 16

ected treasurer, while pro-BNP lawyer Kazi Md Joynal Abedin and pro-AL lawyer Abdur Razzak have won the posts of assistant secretaries.

The elected pro-BNP executive members are Mahfuz Bin Yusuf, Md Ahsan Ullah, Shafiqul Alam Mahmud and Md Mehedi Hassan. The other posts of executive members went to pro-AL lawyers are Ashraf Hadi, Shahana Parveen and Md Maju Miah.

In the last year's SCBA election, pro-BNP lawyers won eight posts, including president and secretary, and pro-AL lawyers secured six posts, including a vice president.

New scams

FROM PAGE 1

The private bank also concealed information on the defaulted loans to show inflated profit, breaching the Banking Company Act 1991.

The bank's Motijheel branch resorted to "unfair means" to show Tk 367 crore given to 10 companies as unclassified loans though those already became defaulted, according to the BB.

The branch showed only Tk 60 crore as defaulted loans till September last year. But the BB probe found that the amount was more than Tk 619 crore. The private bank had disbursed loans of Tk 1,038 crore between November 2013 and November last year, said the BB probe report.

Two ex-directors of the Farmers Bank -- Alamgir and Mahabubul -- approved a major portion of the loans, abusing their position and without taking consent from other board members, it mentioned.

The bank's Motijheel branch gave loans of Tk 130 crore to NAR Sweaters Ltd in different phases between 2016 and last year though its head office rejected the firm's credit proposals.

The branch disbursed the funds to settle back-to-back letters of credit (LCs) opened by NAR Sweaters. The RMG company's outstanding loans stood at Tk 34.39 crore when the BB carried out the investigation, said the report.

The private bank will have to pay for the LCs and create long-term loans against the firm if it fails to repay the loans in due time, it said.

NAR Sweaters already had defaulted loans of around Tk 50 crore at the Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd (IBBL) when it opened LCs with the Farmers Bank early in 2016.

Though the Farmers Bank management knew that NAR Sweaters had overdue loans with the IBBL, it allowed the firm to open LCs, a Farmers Bank official told this correspondent.

Asked, Shahabuddin Ahmed, commercial manager of the firm, said they filed a writ petition with the High Court in 2016 for having regularised its defaulted loans with the IBBL.

The HC issued a stay order, asking the BB not to show the loans as classified, he said.

Shahabuddin further claimed his firm paid the Farmers Bank Tk 15 crore out of its dues of Tk 34.39 crore between January 1 and March 22 this year.

The RMG company will again open LCs with the IBBL as it has recently paid the bank Tk 2.67 crore to have rescheduled its defaulted loans, he added.

Besides, Advanced Development Technologies, a realtor, got the Farmers Bank's approval to a Tk 45-crore loan as working capital within hours of opening an account with its Motijheel Branch on February 28, 2016, according to the BB.

Usually, it takes at least a couple of months for a new client to get a bank's approval to a loan.

Three months later, the Farmers Bank approved another Tk 20-crore loan to the firm though it didn't get back even part of the previous loan with repayment period of one year.

The bank gave the additional loan without verifying the realtor's repayment capability. Now, the bank is left with defaulted loans of Tk 69.34 crore that include interest.

Of the Tk 65-crore loans, the realtor and its concern Advanced Ready-Mix Concrete Industries embezzled more than Tk 20 crore through fake documents, said the BB report.

The two firms opened LCs against B&F Industrial Park, the beneficiary company, to buy stone.

In reality, no product was purchased, and the two firms misappropriated the depositors' funds with the help of some officials at the Motijheel branch.

Talking to The Daily Star, SM Anwar Hossain, chairman of Advanced Development Technologies, admitted that he is a defaulter with the Farmers Bank.

"I started repaying the loans from January this year. I am making payments twice a week. The entire loan amount will be paid back in the shortest possible time."

He claimed he had not diverted any funds to other sectors and did not commit any wrongdoing. "I did not embezzle any funds from the bank in the name of LC."

He also said the bank sanctioned the Tk 45-crore loan a month after he had opened an account with its Motijheel branch.

Talking to The Daily Star, an official of the Farmers Bank said Anwar had repaid only Tk 56.50 lakh from January 1 to March 13 this year.

In June 2015, the Farmers Bank board sanctioned a loan of Tk 22 crore to Abeda Memorial Hospital before the Tongi-based healthcare institute even submitted an application, according to the BB probe report.

In a bid to legitimise the loan disbursement, the branch later prepared a credit proposal, mentioning a previous date on the document.

The entire loan to the hospital became defaulted, and the amount went up to nearly Tk 27 crore with interest till November last year.

The documents on the sanctioned

loans carry signatures of both Alamgir and Mahabubul, according to the BB.

Ismail Hossain Sarajee, managing director of Abeda Memorial Hospital, told this newspaper that he failed to repay the credit instalments in due time as he was abroad for the last seven to eight months.

"I repaid Tk 89 lakh in different phases between January and March. I will make further payments by this month for having the defaulted loans rescheduled," he said.

However, one of the Farmers Bank officials said Ismail had repaid Tk 74 lakh from January 1 to March 13 this year.

The BB probe also unearthed that the private bank approved Tk 17 crore to Index Housing, flouting the banking rules.

Mahabubul, ex-chairman of the bank's executive committee, sanctioned the loan without even placing the loan proposal before the board. The bank's head office initially rejected the proposal, but Mahabubul approved the loan anyway.

He also used the executive committee's stamp on the documents to legitimise the credit disbursement, found the BB.

As of November last year, Index's defaulted loans with the bank stood at Tk 20.37 crore. However, the bank showed the amount to be unclassified.

Rejaul Kabir, manager of Index, claimed that the company was not a defaulter. Rather, it was the bank which was at fault.

He said Index had to go through financial hardship as the bank failed to disburse the funds in full.

Seeking anonymity, a Farmers Bank official said the housing company repaid only Tk 4.50 lakh from January 1 to March 13 this year.

Apart from these firms, Al-Faruque Bags, a concern of Bogra-based Al-Faruque Group, got loans of Tk 36 crore from the Motijheel branch in January, 2016, though it was a defaulter with another bank.

In August last year, the branch disbursed an additional Tk 14 crore to the firm despite its poor record of repayment.

Al-Faruque's total defaulted loans stood at Tk 47.19 crore as of March 13 this year.

This correspondent recently visited the firm's corporate office in the capital's Green Road area where one of its officials told him that the company was not manufacturing any bags.

"I joined the company two months ago but I have not found any of our factories producing bags," said the official, seeking anonymity.

Asked, one of the Farmers Bank officials said that before approving the loan, the bank did not inspect the company's factories to verify whether it produces bags.

Flouting the banking rules, the Farmers Bank also gave loans of Tk 72.42 crore to Nahar Farmers Group, Tk 54.79 crore to Apollo Trade International, Tk 16.79 crore to Mollik Aquaculture Farm, Tk 25.50 crore to Messers Premjoy, Tk 10.95 crore to Mac Trading and Tk 22.82 crore to Bangladesh Development Company, according to the BB report.

The loans given to these companies have become defaulted, it said.

BB DIRECTIVE

In mid-January this year, the BB directed the Farmers Bank to conduct a functional audit on its Motijheel branch's credit accounts with outstanding amount of Tk 1 crore each and above.

The BB asked the bank to submit the audit report by February 28 but it failed to do so.

Farmers Bank Managing Director Md Ehsan Khasru told this newspaper that the bank employed Artisan Chartered Accountants in mid-January to conduct the functional audit.

On January 4, Ehsan was appointed to replace AKM Shameem, who was sacked by the BB on December 19 for failing to protect the depositors' interests.

Ehsan said steps will be taken in line with the recommendations of the chartered accountancy firm.

A number of defaulter clients, including Advanced Development, Abeda Hospital and Index, applied to the bank for having their defaulted loans rescheduled, he said.

Contacted, ex-Farmers Bank chairman Alamgir, also an Awami League lawmaker, said he had not sanctioned any loans, using his executive power.

"The board of directors of the Farmers Bank officially sanctioned all the loans. The defaulted loans of the bank were below 4 percent when I was the board chairman."

Asked why the branch concealed data on the defaulted loans, Alamgir, also ex-home minister, said the information was incorrect as the branch had no scope to hide data on non-performing loans.

Despite repeated attempts, Mahabubul could not be reached for comments.

The two resigned from the bank board in November last year after the BB asked them to quit over their alleged involvement in loan scams.

Asked whether the BB would take any punitive measures against the persons involved in the scams, BB spokesperson Debashish Chakraborty declined to comment.

Scientists develop helmet scanner

FROM PAGE 16

brain imaging field, and transform the scientific and clinical questions that can be addressed with human brain imaging," said Gareth Barnes, a professor at the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Neuroimaging at University College London, who co-led the work.

Current MEG scanners are cumbersome and weigh as much as half a tonne, partly because the sensors they use to measure the brain's magnetic field need to be kept very cold - at minus 269 degrees Celsius, Barnes' team explained.

They also run into difficulties when patients are unable to stay very still - very young children or patients with movement disorders for example - since even a 5-millimeter movement can mean the images are unusable.

In the helmet scanner, the researchers overcame these problems by using quantum sensors, which are lightweight, work at room temperature and can be placed directly onto scalp - increasing the amount of signal they are able to pick up.

Matt Brookes, who worked with

Barnes and built the prototype at Nottingham University, said that as well as overcoming the challenge of some patients being unable to stay still, the wearable scanner offers new possibilities in measuring people's brain function during real world tasks and social interactions.

"This has significant potential for impact on our understanding of not only healthy brain function but also on a range of neurological, neurodegenerative and mental health conditions."