



(L) Onlookers and relatives of the launch victims wait in patience on the bank of Buriganga as rescue efforts go on; (M) a tired diver takes a respite on the hull of the sunken vessel.

PHOTO: STAR

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Vessel of death full of bodies

106 retrieved so far, 100 more feared trapped inside upturned launch on Buriganga



ABUL KALAM AZAD with FAISAL PARAG, from Narayanganj

At least 106 people, many of them children, drowned in Monday's launch capsizing in the Buriganga off Pagla Mary Anderson Ghat during a twister.

"There might be 15 more bodies inside the vessel," Deputy Assistant Director of Fire Service Manjur Kader said on the scene yesterday.

Survivors said an estimated 100 people, including five ansars, were still missing after MV Mittali-3 went down in the Buriganga with over 400 passengers on board.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent quoting survivors said about 52 passengers were trapped inside another launch, A M Mozlishpur, which sank in the Meghna off Parishayar village on Monday during a nor'wester.

The vessel was heading to Debidar upazila in Comilla district from Astagram in Kishoreganj with a bridal party on board.

Meanwhile, rescuers from navy, fire service and water transport authorities continued operation to search out the missing and rescue those still trapped inside the sunken, upside down MV Mittali-3.

Of the 106 fished out bodies, 90 were identified by relatives till 8:00pm yesterday.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) sources said rescue vessel Hamza was on way to Pagla from Barisal to salvage the sunken ship.

"No doubt, there are some bodies inside, but our rescue team could not recover those as they were deep inside the launch," said Lieutenant Zillur Rahman, a diving officer of Bangladesh Navy.

He said the incident took place due to faulty design of the launch.

Rescue ship Rustam reached the scene early yesterday, but could not salvage the 150-tonne launch, too

PHOTO: AFP

Rescue vessel Rustam yesterday tries to pull up the sunken ship, MV Mittali-3, now floating upside down on the Buriganga near Pagla. The effort failed and another rescue vessel, Hamza, is now on its way to join the operation.

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Lonely turns the journey

ABUL KALAM AZAD with FAISAL PARAG

A dazed Osman Gani stared vacantly at the pickup van. Shrouded in white sheets on it is his entire family -- wife and three daughters. Those who were his most dear and near ones a day ago are now only a pile of mortal remains.

All the 40-year-old day-labourer can remember is: "Abba, please come

with us. I will not enjoy the journey without you."

"Please come, Abba," he can still hear the plea of Lipi. The five-year old daughter insisted on when Osman tried to ship out his family to village home at Keshabpathi under Jirakathi union of Patuakhali district.

Unable to part from the beloved daughter, Osman bought another ticket and boarded the MV Mittali-3 along with wife Taslima and other daughters Nasrin, 9, and Tamanna, 2. Who knew it would be their last journey together, the journey to death!

Osman came to Dhaka only two days ago from the village. He planned to send the family home and stay in the capital himself for a few days before returning.

The launch set off at 5:30pm with about 400 passengers on board. As it approached Pagla, a furious wind, packed by a monster twister, began to blow. Shrugging off the passengers' pleas to moor, the master began manoeuvring his craft ahead.

Before the passenger could understand anything, a sudden wild flurry of the killer twister overturned

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Plying of vessels banned from 3pm to 8pm

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to impose a restriction on plying of passenger launches between 3.00pm to 8.00pm in the evening, during the Bengali month of Baishakh.

The decision, effective from today, was taken to avoid launch mishaps during this time because of frequent nor'westers, according to sources.

Talking to BBC Bengali service, shipping minister Akbar Hossain said passenger launches would not be allowed to leave terminals in the five hours beginning at 3.00pm.

He said that a study of the weather pattern of the last 10 years has revealed that the risk of a launch mishap was the highest in the evening.

He further said that the government could not adopt the necessary measures to prevent launch accidents owing to lack of manpower.

According to sources, four passenger launches have been lost in nor'westers so far this year.

Two women's same tale of torment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the sky darkened and the wind picked up, Jyosna Begum tried to peep through the window of the overcrowded launch to see what was going on.

Suddenly, the launch jolted violently and began to sink. In her frenzy, Jyosna looked for a way out.

But it was water all around, sloshing heavily.

Then, she could barely make out the tarpaulin that covers the side of deck. She frantically removed it and swam above the water. Later, rescuers dragged her ashore.

Once on ground, she broke

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Jyosna Begum

Hosne Ara

Market pegged exchange rate likely by June

Major NCB reforms planned to get IMF funds

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh is likely to opt for a floating exchange rate by June to get anti-poverty funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As part of a deal, the government has agreed to wide-ranging reforms in the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) -- privatising Rupali Bank, putting the management of Agrani Bank in private hands and restricting large loans from the state-owned banks, according to sources.

If the conditions are met, the government will get about \$2 billion for three years, it was agreed in a wrap-up meeting on the interim poverty reduction strategy paper (IPRSP) with the IMF yesterday.

"The IMF says that we would not face any problem by introducing floating exchange rate and that it can be done right now. But we are hesitant. We would take the decision after discussing with exporters, chambers and financial sector reforms and revenue expenditure review commissions," Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said yesterday after the

meeting.

He said many regional countries including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal have introduced floating exchange rate and Bangladesh cannot remain isolated with controlled exchange rate regime for long.

"We need to do that. But it is very risky to go for floating exchange rate with a poor foreign exchange reserve," he said.

Exporters, facing stiff competition in the global market, would be benefited if the rate is deregulated, he said.

"A market-based exchange rate would be a big incentive for them and providing cash subsidy to them is quite difficult," he pointed out.

And if the IMF fund is available, the annual development programme (ADP) size would also increase.

"If everything goes well, the ADP size would be Tk 3,000 crore to Tk 4,000 crore bigger than this year's. Loans from donors depend on some political decisions and we need to discuss these issues in the parliament," Saifur said and hinted that the ADP size for the next year may

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