

Road accidents kill 35 in four days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 35 people were killed and 98 others injured in a string of road accidents in the last four days, police and witnesses said.

Six people were killed and 16 injured when a truck laden with coal collided head-on with a Nabinagar-bound passenger bus at Dayapur on the Chittagong-Comilla Highway on Tuesday morning.

The injured were admitted to Comilla Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where the bodies of the dead, including that of the truck-driver, were also sent for autopsy.

Four people, including a police sub-inspector, were killed and two others injured in two accidents in Gazipur the same day.

Zakir Hossain, 30, sub-inspector of Joydevpur Police Station, was killed

instantly when a speeding passenger bus hit his motorbike near Gazipur Police Lines.

Three people were killed and two others injured when a passenger bus hit a rickshaw van in the town in the morning.

Our Comilla correspondent adds: Four members of a family were killed and another member was injured when a bus hit the auto-rickshaw they were riding on at Monipur in Burichang upazila on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway on Tuesday.

The dead are: Nazrul Islam, 38, his wife Sufia Khatun, 28, their son Shaon, 7, and daughter Sraboni, 2, of Moricha village in Burichang upazila.

The injured, Zannatul Ferdous, was hospitalised.

At Nana Chandpur in Barua upazila on the Comilla-Chandpur Road, a Dhaka-bound taxicab rammed

into a Comilla-bound bus at 9:00pm, killing the cab driver and injuring 21 passengers of both vehicles in the day.

In two other accidents, Bellal, 24, and an unknown man, aged about 45, were run over and killed at Amanganda in Chouddagram and Syedpur in Burichang on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway the same day.

At Bagur in Chandina upazila on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway, unidentified driver of a Dhaka-bound truck was killed and three people were injured when the truck collided head-on with a bus.

Two men were killed and 15 people seriously injured when a Kishoreganj-bound passenger coach from Dhaka skidded off the road near Sonaimuri on Thursday.

The identity of the victims, aged 25 and 35, who were pronounced

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India ready for talks with ULFA

AFP, New Delhi

India's ruling party said Thursday that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was ready to talk with a rebel group in the northeastern state of Assam blamed for killing 54 Hindi-speaking settlers.

"Doors for talks with the prime minister are open and so the ULFA should respond to the peace overtures," Indramoni Bora, provincial president of Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, told reporters.

The ULFA, or United Liberation Front of Asom, has not responded to past government appeals to end its campaign for an independent homeland. More than 10,000 people have died in insurgency in Assam in the past two decades.

The ULFA has demanded that settlers from India's densely populated Ganges plain leave Assam and is accused by the government of orches-

trating more than a week of attacks on Hindi-speakers.

Around 5,000 people, both Assamese and Hindi-speakers, marched for peace Thursday in the state capital Guwahati. Similar rallies were organised around the state including in the worst-hit district, Tinsukia in the far east.

The violence erupted after unemployed young men in the Hindi-speaking state of Bihar attacked trains heading to Assam, injuring 50 people. The youths were angry that militants had prevented candidates from Bihar from taking examinations in Assam for jobs at the state-run railways.

The influential All Assam Students Union, which had called a strike November 17 to protest the train attacks, on Thursday urged a return to calm.

"The ULFA or any other perpetrators of violence should stop the

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Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina exchanges Eid greetings with US Ambassador to Bangladesh Harry K. Thomas, Jr. at Awami League's Dhanmondi office on Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR

Mortar attack in Iraq kills US soldier

REUTERS, Baghdad

A mortar attack on a US base in Iraq killed an American soldier yesterday, hours after President George W Bush made a secret visit to Baghdad to spend Thanksgiving with US troops fighting to end a guerrilla war.

A military spokeswoman said the soldier was killed when a mortar bomb hit the headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division in the northern city of Mosul. Since Bush declared major combat over on May 1, 185 US soldiers have been killed in action.

Earlier, another US soldier died from a gunshot wound he received while in barracks in the flashpoint western Iraqi town of Ramadi, the coalition press office said late Thursday.

The US Army's 82nd Airborne division said in a statement that a medic was able to revive the soldier, who was found without a pulse, but that he died later of his wounds.

An explosion caused by a missile or mortar shell shook the Italian embassy in Baghdad late Wednesday, Italian RAI public television reported.

There were no victims, with only material damage to the second floor of the embassy, it said.

The attack, at around 11:30pm, came two weeks after a truck stuffed with explosives blew up at Nasiriyah in southern Iraq killing 28 people including 19 Italians.

Another report says, two young Iraqi sisters were killed by US troops near Baqubah, some 60 kilometres north of Baghdad, police and family members said yesterday.

American troops at Ibn Firas airport, seven kilometres from Baqubah, shot Fatima and Azra, 15 and 12, on Thursday at midday as

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PHOTO: STAR

Smoke spirals out of shops in flames, as a fire gutted nine furniture outlets, a restaurant and a vulcanising workshop on Kuril Biswa Road in Dhaka yesterday. The blaze, sparked by a burning rag end, cost Tk 15 lakh in lost property before firemen controlled it in a 40-minute battle.

Keraniganj AL leader gunned down

UNB, Narayanganj

An Awami League (AL) leader was gunned down in broad daylight at Jazira Bazar Market Owners' Association office under Keraniganj Police Station yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the victim, Badiuzzaman Badu, 45, also a local businessman, was attending an arbitration when he was attacked by a group of gunmen.

"A group of about five men fired at random as they stormed into the Association office at around 3:30pm. They then shot Badu dead at point-blank range before leaving the spot," said an eyewitness account of the incident.

The victim was rushed to a hospital in Narayanganj where he was proclaimed dead. The body was riddled with 12 bullets, doctors said.

Badu's family members blamed BNP cadres for the murder.

Local AL leaders rushed to the hospital after hearing about the murder.

Wife burnt to death for not giving Eid gift

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A husband allegedly burnt his wife to death on the Eid day at Godnail village in Narayanganj, as her parents did not give him money to buy new clothes.

The victim Munni Akhter, 22, was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at around 8:30pm and she died at 10:00 the following morning.

Munni came to her father Chand Miah, a mason, three days before the Eid and asked for Tk 2,000 for her husband Mohammad Aslam, said Munni's aunt Joynab Begum. Munni's brother Sohel could manage Tk 700 for her, she added.

Angered by the offer of a lesser amount, Aslam, a garment worker, beat up Munni in the morning when she asked him to buy something on the Eid day.

He beat up her again when Munni's sister Moushumi came to invite him to their house at the same village.

Sources said the couple, married a year back, locked in an altercation in the evening and Aslam burnt his wife by pouring kerosene on her.

"I was in my grocery shop when I heard a cry," said Din Mohammad, Aslam's father. "I rushed home and found she was on fire."

A case was filed and police arrested Aslam's parents. Aslam is absconding since the incident.

In another incident, a widow who sustained burn injuries on November 20 at Jhalakathi died on Thursday morning at the DMCH.

Rani Begum alias Raoshan Ara Begum, 45, used to live alone in her house at Rajpasha, Shekherhat, Jhalakathi.

Misceants allegedly made an arson attack on her house at around 2:00am when she was sleeping, said her brother Hosne Jamal Khondokar.

She was rushed to Jhalakathi General Hospital and to the DMCH the next day.



Steve Waugh announces retirement

AFP, Sydney

Australia's veteran cricket captain Steve Waugh announced here Wednesday that he will retire from international cricket at the end of the upcoming Test series with India.

The Sydney-born 38-year-old batsman, who has won almost every honour in a Test career spanning 19 years, said he had advised Cricket Australia of his intention to step down as both captain and player.

"The upcoming Sydney Test will be my last for Australia should I be selected to play," Waugh told a packed news conference.

"My present form of fitness suggests I could play on. However, all good things must come to an end and I believe Sydney is a perfect place to finish."

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130 drown as boat capsizes in Congo

AFP, Kinshasa

At least 130 people died when an overcrowded boat capsized during a storm on Lake Maïndombe in western Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the UN peacekeeping mission here said Thursday.

Twenty-three people were rescued from the vessel, the Dieu Merci (Thank God), which capsized Tuesday night on the lake in Bandundu province, around 600km northeast of the capital Kinshasa.

Rescuers were continuing to search for survivors of the accident, which was reported only Thursday due to poor communications with the remote part of the vast central African country.

The boat's owner told AFP earlier Thursday that 120 people had died.

"When the offboard engine Dieu Merci, which was made up of two coupled fishing vessels, left Inongo, it was carrying 305 passengers, of whom 120 have been pulled from the lake's waters and buried while 23 survivors are in hospital," said the vessel's owner, Ntomba Nzondo, his voice trembling.

High winds and a rainstorm were whipping up large waves on the lake, which caused the boat to capsize when it was about 50 kilometers south of Inongo town, he said.

Earlier, the governor of Bandundu province reported 103 bodies had been pulled from the water, 12 of them children.

Governor Oscar Bala said he estimated that about 400 people were on

Most garments don't conform to rules

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most of the 2,600 garment factories operating in the city and its suburbs do not comply with rules nor do they uphold rights of thousands of workers.

According to an estimate of the BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association), 3,600 garment factories are in operation across the country, with 2,600 of them in Dhaka city and its environs.

The government sent a letter to the BGMEA in October 2000, pointing out the violation of labour rights by the garment factories and asked the association to go by the rules.

Most factories are continuing their production without safety measures; and electric wires, switch boards and other equipment that do not live up to the standards prove a great danger to workers.

"Every garment factory should check electric wires, switch boards and other electric instruments regularly. But they don't do that," said a mechanical supervisor of a factory in Mirpur.

The clauses 37 to 52 of the Factory Rules, 1979 state that the factories have to take proper steps against fire.

Besides, many factories keep their main gates locked, blocking safe escape of workers during fires, and

have no emergency stairs.

Seventy-eight garment workers died in stampedes triggered by fires from 2000 to 2003 in the city and its suburbs, as the factories had no emergency stairs for safe escape.

A lot of garment factories are located in alleyways of Moghbazar and Malibagh where fire-brigade vehicles cannot reach.

The problem does not end here. Garment workers are denied their basic rights.

The workers alleged that women workers are deprived of maternity leave. But the Maternity Benefit Act, 1939 says a woman worker is entitled to a maternity leave of 12 weeks.

Hazera Begum of Malibagh, said, "The authorities never grant us maternity leave. If anybody wants to go on maternity leave, the authorities recruit another worker in her place. As there is no shortage of workers, the authorities do not care about us."

The working environment of many factories is not healthy, as they have no pure drinking water and proper ventilation and toilet facilities.

But the clauses 25 to 28 of the Factory Rules, 1979 clearly state that sufficient arrangement must be made to ensure pure drinking water and toilet facilities.

Mamunur Rahman, a garment

worker of Kalyanpur, said they have to drink water supplied by Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority) and the toilets are in a rundown condition.

It is widely alleged that many factory owners do not pay minimum wages to their workers according to the Wage Board of 1994. The workers are forced to work overtime but are not paid for extra time in line with rules.

A worker should get double the basic pay, according to the rules, but most factories pay a meagre sum.

Contacted, Quazi Muniruzzaman, BGMEA president, told The Daily Star that the allegations of infringement of workers' rights are true in some cases but the violation of factory rules is a rarity.

"Initially, the garment industry was developed in an unplanned way, but now the factories are being set up in compliance with rules," said the BGMEA president.

"With the help of government, we are planning to set up a garment village at Adamjee and no-one will be allowed to set up any factory if rules are not followed," the BGMEA president asserted.

Muniruzzaman also suggested that the factory owners follow the rules set by the government, otherwise it would be difficult for the garment industry to survive.

Time has come to quit C'wealth, says Mugabe

AFP, Harare

President Robert Mugabe, who has not been invited to a key Commonwealth summit next week, said yesterday his country is ready to "say goodbye" to the grouping if it refuses to treat the southern African country as an equal partner.

"If our sovereignty is what we have to lose to be readmitted into the Commonwealth, well, we will say goodbye to the Commonwealth, and perhaps time has now come to say so," Mugabe said in a eulogy at a funeral of a former nationalist.

Zimbabwe was suspended from the 54-member grouping of former British colonies in March last year following a presidential election that some international observer groups said was marred by violence, intimidation and major electoral flaws.

This week Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, who is due to host the December 5-9 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

(CHOGM) in the capital Abuja, said Mugabe had not been invited.

However, this has not been acknowledged by Harare. This week state media said Obasanjo was yet to invite Mugabe.

And on Friday, Mugabe suggested he would be attending the summit and would be keen to see if the group lived up to its claims of giving all members equal partnership.

"We expect no less (equal status) from the Commonwealth if it merits our membership, if its claim to be a club of equals is to be sustained."

"And I want to see whether that principle of equal membership shall be sustained as we proceed to the next session of CHOGM," Mugabe said in the speech broadcast on state radio.

He said Zimbabwe valued its membership of other organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the UN because it was treated as an equal.

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DOWN TO EARTH

Sinking to depth of civic chaos

ASM NURUNNABI

There are some sore spots in city areas, a couple of which stand out in terms of miseries they represent. The cases of Karwanbazar and Jatrabari may be cited in this context. Living in these areas looks like a veritable ordeal. Kawranbazar presents a spectacle of widespread squalor unredeemed by any efforts for improvement. One may wonder how a prime commercial area could be allowed to sink to such a low depth of civic chaos despite its prime location.

The galling aspects of this area are the abominable congestion of makeshift kutcha structures sprawling over a major part of the bazar. These numerous structures conduct a variety of retail businesses covering different kinds of vegetables, cooking ingredients and spices. The retail

sales are conducted through characteristic system known as 'palla' under which bulk sales of at least five kg measure are in vogue. Other kinds of consumer items, such as children's wear, lungis, shoes, cut pieces of dress materials, are on sale here in substantial quantities. Besides these, there are scores of roadside tea-shops catering to the needs of rickshawpullers, rickshawvan drivers and an assortment of day labourers for low priced snacks like small loaves of bread, bananas and tea.

The bazar is more like a wholesale market on account of which truck loads of sellable commodities of many varieties come streaming into the bazar from early evening of each day from outlying areas of the city's peripheries. These bulk arrivals of commodities by trucks are distributed by the 'aratdars' to the small

retailers who cater largely to the numerous city hawkers. The latter fan out into the nearby localities after doing their bulk purchase from the bazar very early in the morning. It is understood that the bulk sales by 'palla' are comparatively very cheap in price, which allow the petty hawkers roving in nearby localities quite a good margin of profit.

The combination of wholesale-retail sales on large scale necessitating the arrivals of a steady stream of trucks and push-carts from early evening each day make the venue of the bazar filthy and utterly revolting with uneven roads and deep slush following heavy rains. The overall environmental situation turns out to be highly depressing.

The irony of this situation lies

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