

## Unfit vessels put Sandwip commuters' lives at risk

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Unfit vessels are operating between Sandwip and Chittagong, risking the lives of thousands of passengers daily as the government fails to ensure proper ferry services on the Kumira-Guptachhara route, commuters said.

The daily ferry service of the lone sea truck of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) has remained suspended for the indefinite period.

BIWTC is operating only one steamer, MV Baro Aoulia, with a carrying capacity of some 900 passengers twice a week between Sandwip and Chittagong, sources said. Sandwip is an offshore island some 45km off the BIWTC terminal at Sadarghat in the port city.

It forces some 4,000 passengers to cross the channel by privately owned trawlers and motorised boats (MB) to and from Sandwip, risking their lives everyday and falling victim to frequent incidents of boat capsizing.

At least 15 people, most of them are children and women, drowned when MB Imrul Kayesh, owned by one Mosharraf of Sandwip, sank in the channel near Kumira Ghat at Baro Kumira under Sitakunda Police Station on June 8. It operates between Guptachhara Ghat in Sandwip and Kumira Ghat in Chittagong.

Few hours earlier, a cargo boat, MB Azmir, also owned by Mosharraf, capsized in the

channel near Guptachhara Ghat where at least one person remained missing.

An engine boat capsized at the same place of Kumiraghat in November last year.

Local people and passengers said the accidents occurred for lack of proper management of ghats and monitoring of operation of vessels operating without fitness certificates and route permits. Absence of BIWTC sea truck is also responsible for the frequent accidents at the ghat, they added.

Even after the June 8 incident the BIWTC authorities are yet to restore operation of ferry service in the Kumira-Guptachhara route.

The leaders of Sandwip Association in Chittagong demanded immediate resumption of the ferry service at Kumira-Guptachhara route.

They blamed the authorities as well as the leaseholder of Kumira Ghat for the June 8 casualties.

The association leaders threatened to file cases against the authorities of BIWTC, District Council, Chittagong and the leaseholder in connection with the tragic incident.

BIWTC used to operate three steamers MV Baro Aoulia, MV Alauddin and MV Manirul Haq, from Chittagong to Barisal via Sandwip four times a week till June last year. During the period it also operated sea truck Khizir-5 with a carrying capacity of some 400 passengers between Kumira and Guptachhara daily.

But with the over three-decade old and worn MV Manirul Haq and MV Alauddin gone



People wait on the coastal embankment at Kumiraghat, left, for motorised boats while the people walk through a long muddy patch of Sandwipghat, right, to reach their homes.



out of order, BIWTC now operates only MV Baro Aoulia from Chittagong to Hatiya en route to Sandwip only twice or once a week.

The sea truck also suspended its operation earlier this year, said the sources concerned.

Privately owned unfit engine boats dominate the ghat as there is no sea truck or steamer service of BIWTC on the route, the people from Sandwip said.

The vessels operating across the channel through six ghats are under the control of Chittagong District Council from Barabakunda under Sitakunda to Banshbaria under Mirer Sarai upazila.

BIWTC is responsible to provide ferry service at Kumira-Guptachhara route while the district council is supposed to lease out Kumira Ghat to privately-run vessels only to carry cargo not

passenger, said Sandwip Association General Secretary Mosharraf Hossain.

BIWTC engaged Khizir-5 to resume its operation on this route in November last year but was withdrawn in May as the sea became rough, he said.

Rangabali, a steamer, could replace it, he said. But it did not happen as BIWTC had chartered the steamer to a private operator, he added.

"Though BIWTC under its agreement could put Rangabali into operation here, the steamer having its engine out of order was lying idle at Sadarghat. Khizir-5 was also lying in the same condition," sources said.

In this regard, the leaders of Sandwip Association on Thursday resented over giving charter of Rangabali to a private firm when

BIWTC could not provide service due to shortage of vessels.

General Manager (Commerce) Kamal Uddin in Dhaka told The Daily Star over phone that BIWTC could not operate Rangabali as it could not afford the money for salaries of staffs, repair and maintenance of the steamer.

He said "We, however, have arrangement with the charter and hope to resume its operation on Kimira-Guptachhara route after a few necessary repair and maintenance are done within 15 days."

Chittagong District Council Chief Executive Officer Mashiur Rahman said there is no restriction for the privately operated vessels or motorised boats to ferry passengers through the Kumira-Guptachhara ghats.

He said leaseholder can allow anyone to

operate private vessels or motorised boats with fitness certificates and clearance from the authorities concerned.

"Any vessel or motorised boat operating without fitness certificate or necessary permission will face legal action," Mashiur said.

Mashiur, however, refused to say about measures to check the operation of unfit vessels that cause accidents frequently.

Meanwhile, Nurul Alam Akhand, deputy general manager (commerce) of BIWTC in Chittagong, refused to talk to this correspondent about the matter. But the officials here, on condition of anonymity, said due to shortage of steamers and lack of initiatives cause sufferings to the people of Sandwip.



STAR PHOTO

A worker is busy scratching rusted pipes on the footpath along the Madarbari DT (Dhaka-Trunk) Road, one of the busiest roads in the city. The mindless work of metal shops on footpaths also causes serious health hazard to local people as well as passers-by. But the

## Prenatal treatment a distant dream for women in slums

DWAIPAYAN BARUA

"Why shall we go to healthcare centre? Did we not give birth to our children at home when there was no such centre?" said Sakhina, mother-in-law of Rozina, a nine-month pregnant woman.

Rozina, 20, lives with her family at Jhamarpar Bosti (slum) adjoining Old Rail Station. She has no idea about treatment during pregnancy and maternal health service.

Sakhina became surprised when she was asked to take Rozina to a healthcare centre for treatment.

When asked about taking nutritious food during pregnancy, she said it is difficult for her to manage even regular meal.

Thousands of people like Rozina residing in city slums have been suffering from various diseases as they have no access to medical facilities and education.

They are also far from other basic rights.

They have hardly heard of government hospitals or urban primary healthcare centres run by Chittagong City Corporation (CCC). They have great belief or trust in Kabiraj (quack) for treatment. They have no knowledge about various aspects of healthcare, including nutrition, pregnancy or childcare, for which they fall in trouble.

Like Rozina, Reshma, Taslima, Jeba of Jhamarpar Bosti, Josna, Rahimon and Saleha of Dewanhat Bosti under Dewanhat Over Bridge are indifferent to the need of special care for mothers, maternal diseases, birth control or family planning.

Most of the slum dwellers suffer from various diseases like tuberculosis, different skin complaints, chronic diarrhoea, pneumonia and malaria and do not get any medical facilities due to poverty, ignorance and illiteracy.

Asian Development Bank (ADB), Nordic Development Fund and government jointly launched a project titled 'Urban Primary Healthcare

Project' for the poor people in six areas in the port city since 1998, says a tri-monthly bulletin 'Sasthya Barta' published by the health department of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC).

Twenty-five primary health service centres and two maternity health service centres have been rendering medical services under the project.

Each centre was set up at a cost of around Tk 34 lakh, sources said.

The budget for the urban health care project conducted by six city corporations for 2005-2006 was Tk 531 crore while ADB provided Tk 177 crore as loan and Tk 59 crore as grant, SEIDA Tk 29.50 crore as grant, DFID Tk 147.50 crore as grant, UNFPA Tk 11.80 crore as grant and government will provide Tk 106.20 crore, they said.

Official said they have a plan to make, as envisaged by the project, healthcare services available at the doorsteps of the slum dwellers as well as the poor in the city.

## theweekthatwas

### BCL blames finance minister

Leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at a rally on Thursday blamed finance minister for telling that education sector has got the highest allocation in this year's budget.

The BCL MES College unit and college students' union jointly organised the rally on the campus.

The BCL leaders said in fact education sector did not get priority in the budget what the finance minister claimed.

BCL MES College unit president Abul Hossain Abu presided over the meeting while College Student Union Vice President (VP) Md Washim Uddin, General Secretary (GS) Arshadul Alam Bachchu, Sanjoy Bhoomik Kankon, Jashim Uddin Ahmad, Abu Nasir Chowdhury, Joint Secretary Kamrul Hasan, Organising Secretary Osman Gani Alamgir and Habibur Rahman Tareq spoke at the rally.

Speakers observed that the budget would not come to any welfare for the poor population of the country.

### Continue mobile court drive against reckless driving

Speakers at a rally urged the government to continue the mobile court drive against the reckless driving for a hassle-free journey in the city.

### FM lauds CCC mayor

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan emphasised the need for educating both male and female children equally for expedite development of the country.

He also urged the students for being efficient in Information Technology (IT) and English language to keep pace with the modern world.

He was addressing a function at Kapasgola City Corporation Women's College on the occasion of introducing degree pass course in the college.

Chittagong City Corporation Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury presided.

Praising CCC mayor for his role in spreading education in the port city, Morshed Khan hoped that the mayor would also play a vital role in eliminating illiteracy at the national level.

He thanked the mayor as well as the students of the CCC-run educational institutions for their noteworthy results in

the public examinations.

City Mayor in his speech said CCC has taken initiatives, including prizes for the meritorious students, computer training, dresses and textbooks free of cost and free studentships, to inspire the students.

CCC Chief Executive Officer Mostafa Kamal Uddin, Chief Education Officer Prof Roushan Akhter Hanif, Secretary Md Intiaz Hossain Chowdhury, Education Standing Committee Chairman and Ward Commissioner Saleh Ahmad Chowdhury, Ward Commissioner Syed Golum Haider Mintu, Ward Commissioner Anjuman Ara Begum and students Sharmin and Safia also spoke.

Later, a cultural programme was held performed by the students of Kapasgola School and College.

### Photo exhibition begins

An eight-day photo exhibition titled "Light More Light" began on Friday at Photobank Gallery at Surson Road in the city.

Eminent scientist Dr Jamal Nazrul Islam inaugurated the exhibition as chief guest organised by Chattagram Photo Artist Club in cooperation with Asian Paints Bangladesh Limited.

Veteran photographer Murtaza Tawfiqul Islam and Asian Paints Area Manager Mainuddin Ahmed Chowdhury were present as special guests at the ceremony with eminent sculptor Prof Syed Abdullah Khalid in the chair.

Club members Shueb Faruque, Kazi Golum Kuddus Helal, Mostafa Shahrir Tareq, Ashraf, Wahid Adnan, Azad Mahmud, Badrun Nahar Rubaa and Naima Parveen Moni were awarded the Achievement Award at the ceremony for their outstanding success in photography at home and abroad.

Forty-two photographs of 26 club members, including 10 internationally awarded photographs, were on display at the exhibition.

Dr Jamal termed photography as a key part of the modern history as it could depict any historical incident as credible document.

### Rice for poor women

Satkania Upazila Women Awami League on Saturday distributed rice among around 500 poor women.

South Chittagong AL leader Nurul Absar Chowdhury distributed the rice as chief guest at a function at Mirzakhil High School auditorium.

Women Affairs Secretary Shahida Akhtar Jahan presided over the function. Hasina Momtaz, Ahmad Kabir, Helalul Kibria Chowdhury, Jane Alam Jamal, Dilwara Begum, Nurun Nahar, Rasheda Begum, Shah Alam, Abu Saleh and Didarul Alam Shipon also spoke.

The speakers urged the affluent of the society to stand by the poor and distressed section of the society at this time of price hike of essentials.



Professor Dr Jamal Nazrul Islam along with other visitors admire photos at a seven-day exhibition at Photo-bank Gallery on Friday. Chattagram Photo Artist Club organised the exhibition.

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