

Four killed as bus veers off road in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Four people were killed and another was injured as a Dhaka-bound bus fell into a roadside ditch in the district's Chakaria upazila last night.

The bus overturned and fell into the ditch near Chiringa Highway Police outpost on Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway around 10:30pm after the driver lost control, said Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Chakaria

Police Station.

The four, including a woman, were killed on the spot.

Police and firefighters recovered the bodies and rescued the injured and other passengers of the bus, the OC said.

The injured was admitted to the local upazila health complex.

The identities of the deceased could not be known immediately.

BNP in a fix

FROM PAGE 1

Many grassroots leaders want to take to the streets right away, but the high-ups have decided to "go slow".

"Since the government is interfering in the legal process, she is not getting bail. But we will eventually wage a movement to release her," Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, the party's standing committee member, said yesterday.

"Now the release of Khaleda is not just the BNP's cause but also that of the citizens," he said.

The BNP believes in peaceful and organised demonstrations, he added.

Khaleda's family members and BNP leaders alleged that her health had declined due to inadequate and improper treatment at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital where she has been admitted since April 1, 2019.

Khaleda's family members may write to the president seeking her release from jail, but they have to talk to Khaleda and her son Tarique Rahman before attempting that.

Several BNP leaders said the joint leadership of acting chairman Tarique Rahman and the standing committee members was struggling to find a way to free the BNP chairperson.

They believe that the party should now involve the leaders from its national executive committee and other leadership tiers in the decision-making process.

The issue came to the fore after the Supreme Court in November

last year rejected Khaleda's bail petition in the Zia Charitable Trust corruption case.

The national executive committee should hold an immediate meeting to decide about the BNP's next course of action, party leaders said.

Many party men now believe that staging widespread protests is the only means of releasing Khaleda, they said.

However, many BNP high-ups fear that the party's existence would be at stake if such a movement failed.

Party insiders said it might not be possible for Tarique, now staying in London, to analyse the country's prevailing situation from abroad and make the right decisions.

"Tarique Rahman makes decisions based on what the standing committee members and some other leaders tell him," said an adviser of the party.

On several occasions, several vice-chairmen, advisers, and joint secretaries of the party remained in the dark about its decisions, he added.

As per the BNP charter, the party is supposed to hold a meeting of its national executive committee every three months, but it didn't meet in the last 22 months, said a BNP joint secretary.

The party should organise a new council to pick new leadership to step up its activities, he observed.

He said the BNP's movement for Khaleda's release would not succeed unless the Dhaka city leaders became active.



Bangladeshi expatriates wait in long queues at the Bangladesh embassy in Beirut to register their names to return home. They have been facing troubles for several months as the West Asian country is hit by a political and economic crisis. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Job losses, low pay hit expats

FROM PAGE 1

and the ouster of sectarian leaders who have ruled the country since its civil war ended in 1990.

Those protesters brought down the government of prime minister Saad Hariri on October 29.

The crisis has meanwhile hit hard the migrants.

"My factory was shut in October. Now I am living with some Syrian refugees. I hardly find work on three or four days every month. That's how I'm surviving," said Rana Ahmed, who went to Lebanon in August 2016.

Forty-year-old Rana, who used to work as a machine operator at a factory in Nahar Ibrahim area, some 47 kilometres north of the Lebanese capital Beirut, said he became an undocumented worker last year.

On February 2, Rana paid the Lebanese authorities some \$300 in fines for staying illegally in the country for nearly a year.

"I took the money from my family in Brahmanbaria. After paying the fine, I was registered with the Bangladesh embassy to return home. But the Lebanese authorities are now taking a long time to complete the necessary paperwork.

"Whenever I am cleared to go, I will have to bring money from home again to pay for my air ticket," Rana, father of two daughters, told The Daily Star over phone yesterday, adding that some 15,000 Bangladeshis live in Nahar Ibrahim area.

Several other migrant workers in Lebanon echoed Rana's statement and said the situation in the West Asian country was precarious for the Bangladeshi migrants who mainly work at factories and people's homes.

"I sold my ancestral land to come here. I don't know what will I do now,"

said a Bangladeshi migrant, wishing not to be named.

Babu Saha, a Bangladeshi journalist based in Beirut, said, "Many Lebanese employers are not renewing the work permits of their employees. As a result, the workers are becoming undocumented."

With their low or no income, the migrants are not being able to send money home, he said.

Contacted, Abdullah Al Mamun, first secretary at the Bangladesh embassy in Lebanon, said it was true that many migrants were losing jobs while many were being paid low wages.

He said the US dollar went up in value in recent months amid the crisis. "Foreign workers are usually paid in US dollars, but now they are being paid in Lebanese Pound which is highly devalued."

For example, he said, \$100 equaled to 1.5 lakh Lebanese Pound in October last year, but it is now almost 2.2 lakh.

The employers, however, were paying employees in line with the previous rate.

So when the migrants try to send money to Bangladesh, they have to buy dollars at a higher rate. It means they were sending much less than before, Mamun said.

He also said many migrants were not getting salaries regularly. "In such a situation, they are not happy to work here anymore and want to leave for home."

Asked, he said some 600 undocumented workers had returned to Bangladesh since October last year. He, however, could not tell the total number of Bangladeshis who went home since the crisis unfolded.

He said there were some 30,000 undocumented Bangladeshi workers in Lebanon and many of them were

desperate to return home.

Many were visiting the embassy every day for registration. After the registration, the Lebanese authorities investigate the cases and give the workers the green signal to leave the country. "The investigations take some time," said the first secretary.

Currently, the embassy authorities were facing pressure in dealing with the situation.

"After a pause, we resumed the registration on February 2. On that day some 1,600 workers entered the embassy premises and created chaos. Many of them came back again the next day," Mamun told this daily over phone on Wednesday.

He said the landowner of the embassy building issued a legal notice a few days ago, saying he would sue the embassy authorities if it allowed such a crowd to gather again.

In the face of the situation, the embassy authorities have decided to suspend the registration, he said, adding that they had registered the names of some 4,000 Bangladeshis.

On Wednesday, the embassy authorities held a meeting with the Lebanese interior ministry's general security division and requested them to complete the necessary procedures as quickly as possible.

"The Lebanese officials assured us of looking into the matter," he said.

Speaking on the issue, Shakirul Islam Shakil, executive director of migrant rights body Ovbashi Karmi Kalyan Programme, said despite the crisis, recruiting agencies in Bangladesh continued to send workers to Lebanon.

"I think the government should not allow any more Bangladeshis to go to Lebanon until the crisis is over," Shakil said.

BANGABANDHU'S BIRTH CENTENARY

Mamata likely to visit Bangladesh next month

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is likely to visit Bangladesh next month to attend the birth centenary celebration of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Sources close to Mamata said she accepted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's invitation "in principle" to join the event.

They said Mamata would now write to the Indian external affairs ministry for obtaining the clearance for her trip.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also likely to visit Dhaka next month to join the birth centenary celebration of Bangabandhu at the invitation of Hasina.

Hong Kong Airlines to lay off 400 staff

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong Airlines said yesterday it has been forced to slash hundreds of jobs and ask remaining staff to take unpaid leave as the coronavirus outbreak compounds problems at the already-struggling firm.

The announcement by the city's number two carrier comes days after Cathay Pacific said it had asked all its 27,000 workforce to take three weeks leave without salary between March and June because of collapsing demand caused by the health crisis.

The virus, which has infected 24 people, one of whom died, comes just as the city was struggling to recover from months of sometimes violent protests that battered the economy and gutted the key tourism sector.

Hong Kong Airlines said in a statement that strict entry and quarantine measures imposed by countries around the world have further impacted travel demand in the city and the firm had to take "vigorous measures" to mitigate the challenges.

The company said it will lay off 400 employees, with the remainder asked to take a minimum of two weeks no-pay leave per month or work three days a week from February 17 until the end of June.

"There has never been a more challenging time in Hong Kong Airlines' history as of now," the company said in an email statement to AFP.

"As uncertainty looms with the evolving nature of this global issue, weak travel demand will likely continue into the summer season and we need to take further action to stay afloat."

The airline is owned by struggling Chinese conglomerate HNA Group, which has been looking to lower its debt burden.

In November it announced it would delay salary payments to some staff as it struggled to find cash, triggering a warning from regulators that its licence might be at risk. While it managed to keep flying thanks to an injection of funds, it continues to struggle.

The coronavirus, which was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year, spread over the Lunar New Year holiday and has now killed more than 600 people in the country, with at least 31,000 infected.

The crisis has seen a number of governments around the world and in Asia block flights to and from Hong Kong, including popular destinations Taiwan and the Philippines.

DMCH

FROM PAGE 1

doctors immediately when patients will be admitted," the DMCH director added.

On January 26, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) sent a letter to all divisional and district hospitals, asking them to set up such isolation units.

Meanwhile, IEDCR Director Meerjady Sabrina Flora yesterday urged people not to panic over the coronavirus issue, but to remain aware of it, reports BSS.

"Be aware but don't panic over the coronavirus issue as nobody has so far been infected with the virus in our country," she said while addressing a press briefing at the organisation's Mohakhali office.

She also talked about the crew members of the flight that brought the Bangladeshis back to Dhaka from the Wuhan city, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, and the doctors on that flight.

They are now home quarantine and advised not to go outside home, Flora said.

The IEDCR, the state-run disease monitoring wing, has screened 8,396 returnees from China until yesterday from January 21, and all of them are safe.

The IEDCR chief urged all not to spread any rumour and pay heed to any such rumour about coronavirus. "The hype regarding wearing mask to avoid coronavirus is useless."

The disease monitoring wing is running four hotline numbers 0193710011, 0193700011, 0192771784, and 0192771785 to remove any type of confusion about the virus and create awareness among people.

Whistleblower doctor

FROM PAGE 1

around the globe as more than 240 cases have emerged in two dozen countries.

A quarantined cruise ship in Japan now has 61 confirmed cases.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump, whose countries have tussled over trade and human rights, spoke on the phone about the health emergency.

Xi urged "the US side to respond reasonably to the novel coronavirus outbreak", according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Trump expressed his "confidence" in China's ability to tackle the epidemic, the White House said.

Beijing has been angered by bans on arrivals from China instituted by the United States and other countries.

Li, 34, died early yesterday, Wuhan Central Hospital said in a post on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform, an announcement that triggered deep sadness on social media over a doctor hailed as a hero.

"He is a hero who warned others with his life," a fellow Wuhan doctor wrote on Weibo.

There was also a rare collective bout of anger at the authorities and bold demands, including the hashtag "we demand freedom of speech", which was censored.

"Those fat officials who live on public money, may you die from a snowstorm," wrote another Weibo user in a comment that was later scrubbed.

In a sign that the criticism has shaken the Communist government, its anti-graft agency announced that it was sending a team to Wuhan to "conduct a comprehensive investigation into issues involving Dr Li Wenliang reported by the masses".

The foreign ministry and the National Health Commission expressed condolences for his death.

DEATH CENSORED

Li's death has also highlighted the enormous risks that frontline doctors have taken to treat patients in overwhelmed and under-equipped hospitals in Wuhan, the quarantined city of 11 million people where the virus emerged in December.

Medical staff are overstretched and lack sufficient protective gear, the deputy governor of Hubei province admitted Thursday.

Li sent out a message about the new coronavirus to colleagues on December 30 in Wuhan but was later among a group of people summoned by police for "rumour-mongering".

He later contracted the disease while treating a patient. Censors appeared to struggle with how to deal with his death.

State-run newspaper Global Times and state broadcaster CCTV first reported on Weibo that Li had died late Thursday, only to delete their posts after the death rapidly surged to be among the top topics on the popular platform.

The World Health Organization reacted to the first reports of his death

to express sadness.

Analysts have said local authorities played down the extent of the outbreak in early January because they were holding political meetings at the time and wanted to project an aura of stability.

The first fatality was reported on January 11. The death toll has since soared to 636, with 73 more reported yesterday and an additional 3,000 new infections.

GLOBAL SPREAD

To control the spread, authorities have placed some 56 million people in Wuhan and surrounding cities under virtual lockdown.

Authorities in Wuhan are "combing" communities to find people suspected or confirmed to have the virus and place them in quarantine, state media said.

Major airlines have suspended flights to and from the country, while several countries have advised their citizens to leave China.

But cases keep emerging. Two cruise ships carrying thousands of holidaymakers in Hong Kong and Japan have been placed under quarantine as authorities test people for infections.

Another 41 people tested positive aboard the Diamond Princess in Japan yesterday, bringing the total number of infected cases on the ship to 61.

Another cruise ship carrying a passenger suspected of infection with coronavirus will not be allowed to dock in southern Japan, the government said yesterday.

In Hong Kong, 3,600 people are facing a third night confined aboard the World Dream, where eight former passengers have tested positive for the virus.

While global concerns mount, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that that world was facing a "chronic shortage" of masks and other protective equipment.

BNP waits

FROM PAGE 1

still under consideration.

The opposition party will also stage demonstrations in all the district headquarters today to press the same demand.

Yesterday, the BNP organised doa mahfils in mosques across the country after Juma prayers, seeking immediate recovery of Khaleda from various ailments.

On February 8, 2018, the BNP chief landed in the old Dhaka central jail after a lower court sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case. The High Court later doubled her jail term.

Khaleda was found guilty in another corruption case the same year. However, her party claimed that both the cases were politically motivated.

The BNP chief, now facing about 36 cases, has been receiving treatment at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University since April 1 last year.

Trial over but politics isn't

FROM PAGE 1

and may be looking to his own place in history -- defected and voted to convict the President of impeachable crimes.

Ten months from the election, Trump has unified his party around him in Washington and in the heartland at a time when questions are mounting about the Democrats' willingness to unite after what could be a bruising primary race.

Trump is enjoying the best polling of his presidency -- he hit 49% in a Gallup presidential approval poll this week. His State of the Union address on Tuesday night was a ringing statement of intent that he will use every device of his office to ensure he wins a second term.

Yet Trump didn't emerge from the impeachment saga untouched. Polls showed that around half of Americans wanted him removed from office. Taken with the Gallup data, they paint a picture of a nation split down the middle on the president.

It's not only Trump that emerged from the damaging saga more powerful. The presidency itself was enhanced, after the Senate effectively endorsed Trump's use of institutional power for personal political ends and his blanket policy of ignoring a congressional investigation. That will have huge implications for future Presidents but it also provides an immediate arsenal of new power that this one can deploy right away.

Trump's acquittal also factored immediately into the presidential race -- with former vice president Joe Biden seizing on Trump's escape to elaborate on his core theme that the president is unfit for a second term, as he targets a comeback after a weak performance in the Iowa caucuses.

"I can't imagine being president of the United States and having all one party plus someone from your own party vote to say you should be thrown out of office and view that as a victory," Biden said in a CNN town hall on Wednesday in New Hampshire ahead of the Granite State's primary next week.

Democrats have been laying political groundwork for Trump's acquittal for months in the certain knowledge that there would not be a two-thirds majority to convict him in the Senate.

They built a rhetorical argument that Republicans were covering up for the president by refusing to vote for witnesses, like former national security adviser John Bolton, and blocking further investigations.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-New York, rolled out the

oven-ready strategy before the Senate held its final two academic votes -- on articles of impeachment alleging abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

"The verdict of this kangaroo court will be meaningless. By refusing the facts, by refusing witnesses and documents, the Republican majority has placed a giant asterisk, the asterisk of a sham trial, next to the acquittal of President Trump, written in permanent ink," Schumer said.

"Acquittal in an unfair trial with this giant asterisk, the asterisk of a sham trial, is worth nothing at all to President Trump or anybody else."

The "anybody else" Schumer is referring to may include vulnerable Republican senators in swing states, such as Cory Gardner of Colorado and Susan Collins of Maine, who voted to acquit Trump and will now face an avalanche of Democratic attacks meant to anger suburban voters who are worried about his unchained use of power.

But Democrats were not the only senators who faced difficult decisions. The White House believed up until the vote on Wednesday that it might peel a couple of votes from Schumer's ranks to support its talking point about a looming bipartisan acquittal.

That didn't materialize. No one was more aware of the political perils of impeachment than House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who held off pressure for such a step for months over the Mueller report.

Trump's apparent abuse of power over Ukraine, first revealed by an intelligence community whistleblower, made Pelosi's own political position against impeachment unsustainable.

But the speaker is keen to turn the focus back to the strategy and issues that helped her recapture the House in the midterm election.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries was also an impeachment manager in Trump's trial. But he tried to turn attention away from Ukraine during a news conference on Wednesday.

Jeffries announced Democrats would bring legislation to the floor soon on promoting the rights of workers to organize, to lower health care costs and to negotiate more affordable drug prices.

Such goals might actually require the Democrats in the House to work with the president -- who they accuse of coming into the chamber in the State of the Union address and Tuesday