

Launch disaster: No more body recovered

By Staff Correspondent

The death toll from the launch disaster in the Meghna in the early hours of Friday remained unchanged till yesterday, officials said.

"No more body was recovered from the spot or nearby areas," Deputy Commissioner of Chandpur Rezaul Karim told The Daily Star over telephone last night. He however did not rule out the possibility of finding more bodies.

Sixty-four bodies were recovered when the ill-fated launch ML Rajhonsi was salvaged on Friday evening. Of these, 50 were identified and taken by relatives till Saturday.

Out of the 14 bodies kept at the Sadar Hospital morgue, eleven were identified and taken by relatives yesterday, he said.

It is still unclear how many people were on board the launch when it sank in the Meghna at Ekhaspur, about 30 kms off Chandpur after it was hit by MV Jalkapot-2 amid thick fog at about 3:15 am on Friday. Survivors earlier claimed that it was carrying over 250 passengers.

MV Jalkapot-2 was seized when it reached Dhaka after the accident. It is now in police custody at the Sadar Ghat terminal.

Marine Court Magistrate Abdul Mannan Elias yesterday turned down a prayer by the owner of MV Jalkapot-2 for release of the vessel.

When contacted yesterday, Magistrate Elias said, "I have



Welcome 2001

By Staff Correspondent

The year 2001 was greeted late last night and in the early hours of today in the city amidst fanfare and jubilation.

Hundreds of people joined the celebrations on the New Year's Eve to mark the advent of a new year in the Gregorian calendar.

In the capital, law enforcers had to keep extra vigil to prevent any untoward incident by midnight revellers who drank and danced out the night.

Hotels and clubs arranged special New Year's party while the

Let the smile beam throughout the New Year... -- Star photo by A K M

The year 2000 in retrospect

Politics spares not even the judiciary

By Nazmul Ashraf

Certain acts and judgements of the High Court mainly dictated the course of national politics in the year 2000. In fact, issues concerning the higher judiciary sparked off raging debates.

Besides, US President Bill Clinton's visit, appointment of M A Syed as the new Chief Election Commissioner, introduction of the Public Safety Act, reported attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, deposed president

H M Ershad's return to jail, controversy over reserved seats for women in parliament, publication of the new voter's list, the Eight Murder in Chittagong, killing of journalist Shamsur Rahman and the lingering crisis in the opposition alliance also dominated the matters of politics.

The ruling Awami League generated much of the heat in the political domain by staging street protests against the High Court on

two occasions. It brought out a 'stick procession' when several judges felt embarrassed to hear death reference in the Bangabandhu murder case and sponsored violent street protests after a High Court judge spared five of the convicts in the sensational case.

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Brokers reign passport office at Agargaon

No commission, no passport has become the order there

Star Report

Most of the people applying for a new passport or a renewal at the Agargaon passport office in the city are being forced to pay undue commission to brokers and the office staff.

This corrupt practice involving millions of taka every month has been on for more than a decade now and has put people at the mercy of hundreds of brokers, who virtually control the passport office and its surrounding areas at Shere-e-Bangla Nagar.

"It's no use applying for a passport through proper channel. You either use influence or turn to the brokers. Otherwise you'll suffer," said Apu, a young man outside the office. "The system here is such that the office bearers will encourage you to come through the broker-channel."

One broker claimed that he made between 60,000 to 90,000 taka a month after paying the clerks and officials of the passport office.

At least 50 unauthorised shops have been set up in front of the passport office over the past year for this illegal business.

"The shops act as security for the customers who strike deals. None of these have permanent ownership or valid documents," a plain-clothed security officer said requesting anonymity. "The local police station gets a monthly 'revenue' of five lakh taka from the brokers doing business there."

Some of the applicants, who talked to this correspondent recently, complained that brokers deliberately harass people at the entrance. Some were even

roughed up for trying to get their passports bypassing the brokers.

"If you avoid brokers eventually you are likely to be harassed or your money may be snatched," said Kazi Shaeed, a police constable on guard at the main entrance.

Brokers deliberately pick up a quarrel while selling application forms. The forms are available at a nearby bank, not the passport office. At least ten such incidents were reported in the last six months.

Brokers like Faruk, Sheikh Jahangir (who died recently), Khokan, Ripon, Rafiq, Issa Khan, Akram Hossain, who live in nearby slums, have agents all around the city to attract customers.

The clerks do their regular duties like scrutinising the application forms and putting seals on the passports while keeping in constant touch with the brokers outside.

In most cases, a broker and a clerk make money delivering a passport ahead of the designated date in exchange for 'unofficial' fees. An applicant may receive a new passport within three months of application with Tk 750 deposited at the designated bank. An additional payment of Tk 2,500 would cut down the waiting period to 24 hours.

Money also spins from passport renewals, fake seals, forged statements, etc.

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Bangabandhu murder: Copies of verdicts to be sent to CJ Jan 7

By Special Correspondent

Copies of judgements in the Bangabandhu Murder Case are likely to be sent to Chief Justice Latifur Rahman on January 7 when the Supreme Court and its High Court Division re-open after vacation, court sources said.

On December 14, a Death Reference Bench of the High Court gave a split verdict in the case.

One of the judges, Justice Ruhul Amin, confirmed the death sentence of ten of the accused and acquitted five.

The other judge, Justice Khairul Haq, confirmed the death sentence of all the 15.

A trial court in its verdict on November 8, 1998 gave death sentence to all the 15 accused. All of them are former military officers.

After receiving the copies of the judgements, the Chief Justice would form a third court to review the split verdict on the five accused who were acquitted by one judge.

Papri murder: None arrested yet: Guard, housemaids interrogated

By Staff Correspondent

Police could neither arrest any of the killers of model Papri nor find any clue to the murder as yet.

She was shot dead at her Uttara residence in the city on December 25.

Sources however claimed that members of the Seven Star group, an underworld gang of notorious criminals, were involved in the murder.

They claimed that the killers were well known to Papri and her family. They also claimed that Papri had an affair with Momtazur Rahman Munna. The

'Police deliberately refused to accept compromise appeal'

Complainant applies for withdrawal of case against Morshed Khan

By Staff Correspondent

Owner of Misfalah sweets shop at GEC crossing in Chittagong Azadur Rahman, who filed a case against BNP leader M Morshed Khan MP, his son and several party activists on December, yesterday submitted an application to the Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner seeking withdrawal of the case.

A copy of the application was made available to The Daily Star yesterday.

Azadur Rahman also sent copies of the application to the

home minister, inspector general of police, deputy police commissioner (North), Chittagong, officer-in-charge of Kulshi police station, Chittagong and secretary of Chittagong Press Club.

The shop-owner in his application said that he lodged a complaint with Kulshi thana on December 26 against M Morshed Khan MP, his son Faisal Morshed Khan and others following an untoward incident that caused damage worth about Tk 1.10 lakh to his shop.

He said police recorded his complaint under the CrPC 143/448/323/427/380 and gave him a copy of the case.

Immediately after filing the complaint, Rahman, the plaintiff of the case, said he reached a settlement with the defendants with the cooperation of the local elite.

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JCD rivals trade gunshots to capture central office

By Staff Correspondent

Rival factions of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) traded gunshots and exploded bombs over possession of the central office of JCD at Naya Paltan in the city yesterday on the eve of the 23rd founding anniversary of the organisation.

Witnesses and party sources said a group of armed cadres belonging to the Pintu-Laltu faction all of a sudden came in front of BNP central office in several motor cycles at about 7:30 pm and started firing shots at the JCD office and exploding bombs. The central offices of BNP and its student front JCD are housed in the same building.

Their rivals who were inside come on the street, replied with shots and cashed the 'attackers', they said.

Over a dozen shots were exchanged and as many bombs exploded within a couple of minutes, they said.

Some JCD activists claimed that Pintu and Laltu were seen in a microbus, directing the aborted 'operation'.

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The Politics of Ceasefire

Column: Perspectives by Brig (rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

Prayer Timings

January 1

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-14	5-20
Zuhr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-23	5-30
Esha	7-00	7-30

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 1		5.23 pm
Jan 2	6-42 am	