

Subha salvage

FROM PAGE 12
There is no confirmed report on the number of passengers aboard the launch. Many survivors said the launch was carrying passengers more than its capacity. There were more than two hundred passengers aboard, they said.

Those who jumped into the water defying strong wind and furious crosscurrents of the Baleswar survived the disaster, said the chairman of a Union Parishad (UP) in Mathbaria on condition of anonymity.

Another UP chairman concurred with him in allegation. Some ruling party leaders intimidated them into suppressing the fact that the MV Subha was overloaded, they alleged.

It is alleged that the high officials of Barisal, Barguna and Pirojpur administrations kept mum about the disaster even after recovery of 40 decomposed bodies.

Divers of Hamza, Rustam and BNS Shahjalal are also working under immense pressure of the ruling party leaders, said a highly placed source in the Barisal office of BIWTA.

It was nothing but eyewash in the name of salvage operation, complained the relatives. "How can we believe that the launch cannot be salvaged even after its location underwater has been spotted?" Oddly enough, the divers are destroying the dead bodies, applying

different tactics on instruction of the authorities, they suspected.

Meanwhile, Our Staff Correspondent Aroop Talukdar writes from Barisal that work to salvage MV Subha remained suspended for the fifth day yesterday.

Salvage ship BNS Shahjalal sailed for the disaster spot early yesterday but could not reach there till filing of this report at 7:30 in the evening.

Weather was cloudy in Pirojpur yesterday with Baleswar more turbulent. Scores of people were still seen looking for their near and dear ones 'missing' in the river.

Launch service

FROM PAGE 12
until and unless the decision of the government is not withdrawn, launch owners said.

There are nine motor launches in Khulna having capacity for carrying not more than 150 passengers.

These launches ply on Khulna-Koyra route. But 33 motor launches ply on 17 routes of south-western zone are not legally authorised to carry more than 150 passengers, said an official of Khulna IWTA office.

The suspension of launch service on 17 routes from Khulna has adversely affected economic activities of business community who deal in rice, fishes and vegetables.

Donors' team

FROM PAGE 12
collection, he added.

The development partners of Bangladesh decided to make an on-the-spot assessment of the situation following the deterioration of law and order in the CHT. All the foreign-aided projects halted following the abduction of three European engineers working at a Danish-aided road project at Rangamati on February 16 last year for ransom.

The road project is vital for the CHT since it would make communication easy, facilitating marketing of agricultural produce. The engineers were rescued a month later by the army, but the kidnappers are yet to be booked.

A case was filed in the Nanchar Police Station but there has been no progress. A team of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) from Chittagong recently visited the area but they left without a proper investigation, sources from Rangamati told this paper yesterday.

However, the case has not yet been closed officially, they added.

The abduction and the reported payment of ransom of about Tk 1 crore had led to a series of kidnappings by a section of people patronised by the political groups. This caused the law and order to deteriorate in the three CHT districts, sources said.

The authorities are preparing for a crackdown on the miscreants to curb crimes, a highly placed official in Dhaka added.

Interest rate

FROM PAGE 12

This country while it is very much there even in the West Bengal state of India," said the state minister.

He called for taping the benefit of WTO-induced free market accessibility after year 2004 and explore potential foreign markets for home-grown crops including vegetables.

"We can grow exportable surplus and look for even Malaysian and Thai markets because these countries are moving towards hi-tech industries leaving behind the highly labour and cost-intensive agriculture sector."

The state minister noted that public investment in agriculture has to be augmented to ensuring technology adoption and application. He lauded the journalists for writing a book on contemporary agricultural issues and said, "this is a unique endeavour."

President of the FIDA and editor of the book Dr Golam Rahman chaired the book launching programme while FIDA General Secretary Reaz Ahmad delivered the welcome address. Managing Director of Syngenta Bangladesh Limited Sanwar Ahmed made concluding remarks.

Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council Dr Nurul Alam, Bangladesh Representative of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) Dr Hamid Miah, Member Director

(Seed) of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) Mokhslesur Rahman, Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Marketing (DAM) Shahaj Begum and Prof Sheikh Abdus Salam of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department took part in the discussion.

Attack on journalist: 3 arrested at Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police yesterday arrested three youths from East Majampur area of the town in connection with the attack on Manavazamin Correspondent Syed Nazmul Imam.

The arrested youths are Sohel, 18, Munna, 22 and Babu, 24.

Imam was stabbed by a gang of miscreants while returning home from his office on Monday night.

Local journalists held a rally in the town yesterday demanding immediate arrest of the culprits responsible for the attack.

Death chill

FROM PAGE 1

Quirum told The Daily Star that there were serious threats, as records show, on the lives of some ward commissioners.

Meanwhile, the pace of investigation into Newton and Bina murder cases has slowed down, as police could not arrest the main accused.

Sharika Sarkar, widow of Bina, filed a murder case with the Kotwali Police Station on Saturday accusing 26 people, including local BNP leader Mosharraf Hossain Ripon and his supporter Ranjeet Chandra Nandi.

Police arrested 17 persons -- 15 on May 22 and two last Friday -- in connection with the killing under the Section 54 of the CrPC, but failed to arrest the prime accused Ripon.

Of them, eight people were shown arrested in the Bina murder case. They are Ranjeet Chandra Nandi, Mohammad Liton, Ahmed Parvez Kabir, Shahjahan, Moshiur Rahman, Rahim Uddin Ahmed alias Feli, Selim and Mohammad Al-Amin.

In the Newton murder case were arrested eight persons; and Rubel Hossain Hawlader alias Rubel, one of the arrested, gave confessional statements before the court. On Saturday night, police also attached the properties of BNP leader Moshiur Rahman Masu, an accused in the Newton murder case. But police are yet to arrest him.

Kazi Ismail, the injured bodyguard of Newton, was also arrested on Saturday. He was placed on a three-day remand for interrogation.

Police believe Ismail informed the killers about the whereabouts of Newton in exchange for a huge amount of money.

The sources said that as many as 13 people, including Kala Jahangir, 'Killer' Abbas and Piyal were hired for killing. Five of them shot and killed Newton.

Hepatitis-B

FROM PAGE 1

showed that about five per cent of the population is chronically infected with the deadly virus -- Hepatitis-B -- and the WHO estimates that about 10 lakh people would die from liver cirrhosis and cancer because of the virus infection.

Chances of getting liver cancer are up to 300 times higher for hepatitis B carriers.

"The vaccination programme is to reduce mortality and morbidity associated with chronic hepatitis-B infection, including cirrhosis and cancer," said an official of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) recently.

Hepatitis B vaccine has now been used extensively throughout the world and is currently being incorporated into the EPI of the WHO.

Hepatitis B vaccines have been available globally since 1982 and currently, 90 countries are using the vaccines as part of their national immunisation programmes.

Hepatitis B virus is transmitted through body fluids, most commonly by sexual acts, unsafe blood transfusion and sharing of needles for injections.

Habibul Alam, owner of two vessels, called for dredging of the channels to make them navigational.

Khabirul Haque Chowdhury, associate professor at the BUET, said if every vessel is insured, the insurance companies would ensure that safety procedures on the vessels are properly maintained. He said there is no need to create a separate office for the sector. The BIWTA with all its network must be strengthened and all shipyards must be enlisted and regulated, he stressed.

Now all vessels under 16 Horse-Power are exempted from registration, but the new law would make it mandatory to get every vessel registered, even country boats, with the local authorities, he added.

He observed that 'inadequate stability was the most pertinent cause' of capsizing of launches. Most of the launches have 'high superstructure of steel, making them top heavy.'

"To have proper design of vessels, meeting the stability criteria and to ensure building strictly as per design and thorough supervision by regulatory bodies are the remedies," he said.

Bari stressed that if there was no flaw in the design of the vessels, they would not capsized within a few seconds.

He demanded formation of a single regulatory body to ensure passenger safety. The proposed body should also check deviation from the original design of the vessels.

Salahuddin Ahmed, another marine engineer, said passengers are not safe in most of the launches because 'additional weight has been added to their top,' which increase the risk.

Captain Mohiuddin Abdul Kadir, General Secretary of Nautical Institute (Bangladesh) Branch, said that following the launch disaster in the Meghna, he conducted an investigation and found basic design faults in most of the passenger vessels.

He said the engine room in most of the vessels is not watertight. During a storm, water rushes into the ground floor of a vessel, quickly inundates the engine room and makes the vessel instantly unstable. The engine room must be made watertight.

In that case, even if a vessel sinks, it will take enough time, making it possible to save many lives. BUEU must be given the responsibility of doing the inclination test, he suggested.

The launch owners said although river vessels are the cheapest mode of transportation of both passengers and goods, the sector hardly gets government attention. Allocation for the sector in the annual development programme (ADP) is negligible, they said.

Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam moderated the discussion.

Fitness test

They demanded proper maintenance of river routes through regular dredging.

Most of the participants emphasised the need for ban on use of fishing nets in navigational channels. They said that despite realising huge taxes, the BIWTA has done little to keep the navigation channels safe for vessels.

Due to lack of dredging, most of the rivers have lost navigability during dry season, they said.

Mohammad Baduzzaman Badal, vice-president of launch owners association, resented that launch owners are not included in probe bodies for accidents. He said that they would not accept any probe report without the involvement of owners in the probe bodies.

He said the launch owners were getting the blame for the accidents but they were not getting any incentive for their contribution to the sector.

Abdullah Omar Siddique, Vice Chairman of the Institute of Marine Engineering Science and Technology, said awareness must be created among the people who use the water transport sector. He demanded 'on-the-spot arrangements' for punishing a law breaker in the sector.

Captain Mohammad Enayetus Sobhan demanded that the navigation channels must be 'marked properly'. He said an institution must be set up to produce technical staff such as masters, seafarers and drivers.

The shipping minister said his ministry would soon have about 20 standard prototype ship designs made by experts. The private investors could follow the designs and have their fitness certificates issued automatically.

If a owner does not want to follow these designs and goes for his own design, experts would conduct a fitness test, Akbar Hossain Hossain said. He would try for amendment to the registration laws for vessels in the next session of parliament, he assured.

Now all vessels under 16 Horse-Power are exempted from registration, but the new law would make it mandatory to get every vessel registered, even country boats, with the local authorities, he added.

Khabirul Haque Chowdhury, associate professor at the BUET, said if every vessel is insured, the insurance companies would ensure that safety procedures on the vessels are properly maintained. He said there is no need to create a separate office for the sector. The BIWTA with all its network must be strengthened and all shipyards must be enlisted and regulated, he stressed.

Habibul Alam, owner of two vessels, called for dredging of the channels to make them navigational.

He appealed to the government not to 'burden the owners with lots of rules and regulations'.

Dr Reaz Hasan Khandakar, Head of BUEU's department of NAME, demanded a separate regulatory body to discipline the sector. He said the Department of Shipping (DoS) is already burdened with many other responsibilities and therefore fails to do its jobs properly.

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Jubo Dal activist

FROM PAGE 1

After the incident, the gang went to the Rampura Bazaar.

Neighbours who woke up to gunshots in the morning rushed to the house and found Mian in a pool of blood.

They tried to rush him to a hospital in a private car. But the gunmen who were waiting at Rampura Bazaar again swooped on the private car carrying Mian. They sprayed bullets on him until his death.

Also injured were Raza and Hanif, who were accompanying Mian on the way to hospital.

Bullet-hit in the chest, Hanif was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. And Razu was released before the last election. He is also the principal accused in the Swapan murder case. Swapan, nephew of Mian, was shot dead in front of his mother at Moghbazar two years ago.

Khilgaon police said Mian was killed following a feud over illegal collection of tolls from under-construction buildings and control over garment business in Rampura area.

A murder case accusing Kala Palash and his accomplices has been filed with the Khilgaon Police Station. Police arrested six persons, including wife of Palash on suspicion.

The arrested are Mahmuda Khanam Mridha alias Eva, Babul, Moshred Alam, Shahabudin, Ratan and Alamgir, now being interrogated in police custody.

3 more ships fined for polluting air, sea water

UNB, Ctg

Three more ships, including a ship of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC), have been fined for polluting air and water in the country's largest seaport area.

The port magistrate cut yesterday fined three ships -- Indonesian flag-carrier oil tanker MV Tirota Nitaya, Panamanian flag-carrier MV Amarta Jaya-1, and oil tanker of BSC Bangla Sourav -- Tk 80,000.

Bangla Sourav was fined twice within last one week for polluting water and air.

In addition, the port magistrate also served show cause notices on three other foreign ships anchored at the port jetty for polluting air and water in true sense.

Earlier, CCCI President Farid Ahmed Chowdhury put accent on decentralisation of power and some offices from capital Dhaka to Chittagong to make it the commercial capital in true sense.

CCCI chief also urged the government for establishing 'provincial system of government' and 'second capital' in Chittagong.

Chowdhury alleged that despite a written instruction from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) recently, red-tapism is delaying the allotment of 1.03 bigha land required for setting up the World Trade Centre (WTC) in Chittagong.

Later, an open discussion on different aspects and problems in Chittagong and of businesses was held. CCCI Senior Vice-President SM Nurul Haq and Vice-President MA Latif, among others, attended the discussion.

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