

140 Sadarghat staff withdrawn

Govt to go tough on employees for negligence

RAFIQ HASAN

The government yesterday decided to act tough against the officials and employees responsible for allowing passenger launches with faulty designs to operate and failing to maintain discipline at Sadarghat river terminal.

All the officials and employees numbering around 140 have been withdrawn from Sadarghat -- the country's biggest launch terminal.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting yesterday with Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain

in the chair. Shipping Secretary Zulfiquer Haider Chowdhury was also present.

According to sources, there are around 140 officials and employees of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and the Department of Shipping posted to Sadarghat for maintaining discipline at the terminal and looking after river communication related issues.

The withdrawal came following the staff's failure to keep order which caused a number of launch disasters recently, including the capsizing of MV Nasrin-1 on Tuesday last at the confluence of the rivers

Padma, Meghna and Dakatia near Chandpur.

MV Nasrin-1 sank in the confluence on Tuesday night with around 750 passengers. More than 500 passengers are feared drowned.

The triple-decker launch is yet to be traced.

The meeting also formed an inquiry committee headed by a deputy secretary of the ministry to find out the people responsible for allowing the overloaded launch to leave the terminal.

The committee has been asked to

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PHOTO: STAR

Floodwaters roll across the Kazipur Simanta Road at Sirajganj yesterday as major rivers are in spate, marooning more than 250,000 people.

DND Dam threatened

2.5 lakh homeless in 15 districts as flood worsens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The raging Sitalakhya river threatened to submerge houses of about one million people when it overflowed the Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) Dam.

Elsewhere, about 2,50,000 people became shelterless as the flood situation worsened.

The Sitalakhya spilled over the dam at Kadamtali point in Shiddhirganj, swamping the low-lying areas inside the irrigation project.

Gushing floodwaters carried away homes on wetlands in 15 districts, forcing people to flee home.

Over a million of people, who have been marooned, are facing

acute crisis of food, drinking water and medicine.

The Narayanganj district administration has thrown itself into a frenzy of activities to prop up the vulnerable DND Dam, which was leaking over the last four days, with the help of people. Deputy Commissioner SM Harunur Rashid was supervising the protection activities, locals said.

As the irrigation floodgates of the dam were opened to ease pressure, the low-lying areas of Sanargar, Mizmizi, Kaari, Kadamtali and Kalamtali went under water immediately.

Panic-stricken villagers shifted to higher ground along with their belongings. Hundreds of locals were trying to save the embankment,

dumping sandbags at weak points till dead of night.

Locals said they informed the

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CIA takes blame for Bush's wrong claim on WMDs

Bush still has confidence in CIA

AP, REUTERS, Washington

CIA Director George Tenet is trying to put to rest a burgeoning credibility problem by taking full blame for allowing President Bush to make allegations about Iraq's nuclear weapons programme later found false.

In a carefully scripted mea culpa, the White House on Friday blamed the CIA for its January misstep and Tenet finished the job hours later with a dramatic statement accepting responsibility.

Bush's assertion in his State of the Union address in January that Iraq had sought nuclear materials from Africa "did not rise to the level of certainty which should be required for presidential speeches, and CIA should have ensured that it was removed," Tenet said.

"It was a mistake," he added.

The one-two punch was designed to quell a growing political storm, fueled in part by mem-

bers of Congress and Democratic presidential hopefuls, that challenged the credibility of the administration's arguments that Iraq was trying to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program before the US invasion in March.

Administration officials said that despite the miscue they did not expect Tenet to resign. He is the lone holdover from the Clinton administration and, while distrusted by some conservatives, has enjoyed Bush's confidence.

"I've heard no discussion along those lines," CIA spokesman Mark Mansfield said Friday night when asked whether Tenet might consider resigning. National security adviser Condoleezza Rice, traveling with Bush in Africa, said Tenet still enjoyed the president's confidence.

The current controversy revolves around Bush's assertion in his State of the Union address that Iraq had tried to buy uranium from the

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Akbar to quit only after 'improving' shipping sector

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain yesterday said he would resign after making some positive contribution to the country's shipping sector.

"You will see a lot of changes in the sector in the next two years. I will resign after bringing about those changes," the minister said to a group of journalists following the

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Pope mourns Meghna tragedy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pope John Paul II has expressed his deep shock over the tragic loss of life in the country's latest ferry disaster near Chandpur town, a Vatican message said yesterday.

The Pope expressed sympathy to the members of the bereaved families and prayed for the salvation of the departed souls and early recovery of the injured launch passengers.

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Justice Ruhul Amin gets appointment to SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday appointed a judge to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court by superseding a senior judge of the High Court Division.

Justice MM Ruhul Amin superseded senior judge Syed Amirul Islam in the appointment that was signed by President Iajuddin Ahmed, after consultation with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

The appointment was made to fill up the vacancy created by the retirement of Justice Fazlul Haq on June 30.

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Defence ministry clarification

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Defence clarified a report about irregularities in handling Tk 187.35 crore earned as foreign allowance by army personnel.

The report followed an audit objection placed in parliament.

An Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release said: "It's not correct that the fund collected for welfare was loaned to individuals".

"Rather such funds were invested to accumulate welfare dividends," the press release added.

It also said, "The approval from authorities concerned is obtained before the money is preserved prior to deposit in treasury, or considered

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Barrister Ishtiaq passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Renowned lawyer and two-time adviser of the caretaker government Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed died of old-age complications at BIRDEM Hospital in Dhaka yesterday. He was 72.

He left behind wife National Professor Dr Sufia Ahmed, son Justice Dr Syed Refaat Ahmed, daughter Dr Raina Fateh and a host of grandchildren, relatives, friends and well-wishers to mourn his death.

His first namaz-e-janaza will be held at the Supreme Court premises after Zohr prayers and a second janaza will be held at the Azad Mosque at Gulshan in the afternoon. He will be buried at the Banaani graveyard.

"The condition of Barrister Ishtiaq had been deteriorating since Thursday, a doctor on duty at the Incentive Care Unit (ICU) of the hospital told The Daily Star. Barrister Ishtiaq breathed his last at around 8:45pm.

He was hospitalised when his blood pressure fell on Tuesday. He had been suffering from diabetes, anaemia

and encephalopathy.

His pressure was gradually falling and he was on artificial ventilation, doctors added.

Ishtiaq was admitted to the medicine ward of BIRDEM and later shifted to the ICU, they said.

His body was kept at the Combined Military Hospital, Dhaka.

Born on January 18, 1932 at Gazipur in India, he had his early education at Hili of Dinajpur and Kolkata.

He did his matriculation from Mymensingh Zilla School

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