

12 drown in Meghna launch collision

More feared trapped or dead



The double-decked MV Asha Jaoa remains afloat with its front caved in after it collided with another launch in the Meghna river early yesterday, killing at least 12 people.

AGENCIES, Barisal

Two launches carrying hundreds of passengers collided in the Meghna river in Barisal early yesterday, killing at least 12 people, with more feared trapped or dead, police said.

The double-decked MV Asha Jaoa heading for coastal destinations and the triple-decker MV Sattar Khan bound for Dhaka were packed with people returning to work, along with their families, after a three-day holiday for the Eid-ul-Azha.

The accident occurred at about 2:00am in Hijla upazila, 282 kilometres south of the capital, as the vessels were sailing between Dhaka and Barisal in predawn dense fog.

Some survivors put the number of missing at about 150. Both launches were damaged, with the MV Asha Jaoa badly caved in, suffering most of the casualties, police said.

Police said each vessel was carrying about 500 people and both remained afloat after the collision. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina expressed their condolences for the bereaved.

"We are getting conflicting

PM asks AL to talk demands in parliament

BSS, Pirojpur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the main opposition Awami League (AL) to join the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) and talk about their demands and other issues in the House.

Addressing a huge public meeting at Swarupkathi Government College ground under Nesarabad upazila in the afternoon, the prime minister accused the opposition party of attempting to unleash terrorism and anarchy to thwart the welfare of the people.

"They (AL) have become unnerved and crazy sensing their future as the four-party alliance government initiated massive development programmes in the country which have also attracted the foreign development partners," she said.

The prime minister urged the people to stand against terrorism and extend cooperation to take forward the development activities initiated by her government.

She said the main opposition party opted for hartals, terrorism and destructive activities on the

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Announcement

The next instalment in our series The Strength Within comes out Saturday. The story this week is how community advocacy is helping the withdrawal of children from working in bidi factories in Haragach Bandar.

BIMST-EC meets to sign draft FTA tomorrow

Dhaka's demand for special treatment to be resolved

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bangladesh's demand for special treatment as a least developed country in a proposed free trade area in BIMST-EC is the only issue to be resolved at the two-day ministerial meeting of the regional grouping that begins in Phuket, Thailand tomorrow.

Sources in the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation said Bangladesh suggested that it should be given special treatment in view of revenue losses stemming from free trade and its narrow manufacturing base.

They pointed out that no other regional economic grouping contained such a provision.

They hoped that the Phuket meeting would facilitate more effective economic integration of the LDCs in BIMST-EC and bridge the development gap between member-nations.

On top of the BIMST-EC meeting at the level of foreign and commerce ministers in the Thai sea resort is the free trade area (FTA) which is likely to be signed there.

To ensure that FTA is implemented in right earnest, the meeting is also expected to take up strengthening of transport links among BIMST-EC countries.

A rail link between New Delhi and Hanoi and enhanced shipping links

are likely to figure in the talks, the sources said.

India's state-owned firm RITES has been given the task of preparing a feasibility study for revival of a 315km rail track between India and Myanmar.

Among other issues likely to come up at the meeting is a proposal to introduce a business card that will allow easier travel for businessmen between BIMST-EC countries.

The grouping will review progress in cooperation in six high-priority areas of cooperation identified when it was set up in June 1997. Among the areas are trade and investment, energy, fisheries, transport and communications, technology and tourism. The Phuket meeting will also touch on promotion of tourism among member-countries with the initiative taken by India.

The Indian cabinet last night approved the signing of the FTA accord to perk up trade and economic

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Announcement

The Daily Star drops its weekend magazine today because of the Eid-ul-Azha vacation. The price of the 20-page newspaper remains at Tk 7.

BANDARBAN KIDNAP No clue yet to businessman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Four days into the abduction of Hasan Mahbub Bablu, law-enforcing agencies could make no headway in discovering any whereabouts of him.

No group also has claimed responsibility of abducting Hasan, director of a private tourist resort here.

The deputy commissioner (DC) of Bandarban said the district administration had discussed the matter with local political leaders, adding State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammed Nasiruddin would come here Sunday to review the

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Six bodies retrieved in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Six passengers travelling in a trawler were found dead on Buragouranga river under Dashedina upazila Tuesday night. They are believed to be killed by pirates.

The passengers are Chandu Khan, 60, Litu Begum, 30, her son Masud, 5, eight-month-old Faysal, Panchu Khan, 65, and Shah Alam, 45 -- all from Dashedina.

They went missing as the pirates looted and sank the Rangabali-bound passenger trawler on January 31.

A case was filed with the Dashedina Police Station. Police arrested Razzak, 35, Kuddus, 30, Shankar Chandra Das, 40, and Jashim Biswas, 35, on suspicion.

Corruption, bitter political rivalry threaten democracy

Rocca for Bangladesh leadership taking serious action

UNB, Dhaka

Bitter rivalries between two leading political parties and one of the highest corruption rates in the world threaten to undermine democratic stability of Bangladesh and impede its economic growth, said US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca.

"The United States cannot help put Bangladesh on the path to sustainable development without that country's leadership taking serious

action," she said on Tuesday, asking the government to set up long overdue anti-corruption commission, separate lower judiciary from the executive control, strengthen basic education and create environment for foreign investment.

Speaking to the Asia Society in New York, Rocca outlined the region's importance to the Bush administration and the US policy towards South Asia. Her statement also outlined the current situation

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Ekushey book fair begins tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

Amar Ekushey Book Fair begins tomorrow on the Bangla Academy premises in the city as part of the month-long programmes for observance of the Language Martyrs Day. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is scheduled to inaugurate the fair at 4:30pm on the day. The book exhibition will continue till February 29.

A total of 312 stalls have been set up this year at the traditional fair site. The budget for holding the fair is Tk 24 lakh.

Bangla Academy authorities will publish 54 books of different writers during the exhibition this year.

Security has been tightened in the area, within the precincts of Dhaka University campus, for the visit of the prime minister.



PHOTO: STAR

Workers yesterday give final touches to bookstalls at Bangla Academy ahead of the Ekushey book fair beginning tomorrow.

AL for stiff agitation at end of ultimatum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League (AL) is set to move for an agitation to bring down the government on expiry of its one-month ultimatum on February 10 for meeting its 15-point demand.

Emerging from an emergency joint meeting of the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) and different front organisations at the party's Dhanmondi office yesterday, AL Acting General Secretary Obaidul Kader told newsmen: "We'll go for tougher movements and turn the

current programme into a mass upsurge." He said the party would go for a mass movement to topple the government after the hartal called on February 12.

AL President Sheikh Hasina chaired the 90-minute meeting just five days ahead of the expiry of the ultimatum she had announced from a January 10 rally at Paltan Maidan. The AL's 15-point demand includes, among other things, curbing downslide in law and order and unabated price hike of essentials.

Briefing the newsmen after the

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সেফটল

ঔষধ প্রশাসন কর্তৃক অনুমোদিত একটি শক্তিশালী জীবাণুনাশক

স্বাইল্যাব লিমিটেড
বিসিক শিল্পনগরী, কুমিল্লা

◆ কুমিল্লা ফোন : ০৮১-৭৬৮৩০, ৭৬৭৮৯, ৬৮৩৮৩
◆ ঢাকা ফোন : ৭১১৭২৬০, ০১৭১৮৯০১৬৭-৬৮

City clothes shop robbed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers looted valuables said to be worth Tk 5 lakh from a clothes store on Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka Wednesday night.

Jafar Ahmed, owner of the Jirkon Abhijit Sari Biponi Kendra at Suman Super Market, said his shop has been plundered during the Eid vacation.

"I closed my shop at around 1:00am on February 1 and left for home. Four guards were supposed to be on duty during the Eid," said Jafar.

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GAS PIPELINE SCAM

Showcause on 14 Petrobangla, Titas officials

SHARIER KHAN

Petrobangla and its affiliate Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd. yesterday asked 14 of their high officials to explain why departmental actions would not be taken against them for irregularities

in a gas pipeline project.

The action came in the wake of allegations that the officials in connivance with a group of contractors siphoned off Tk 30 crore from the over-estimated Tk 60 crore Bangabandhu Bridge Approach

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German court clears Sept 11 suspect

AFP, Hamburg

A German court yesterday cleared a Moroccan student of accessory to murder in the September 11 attacks in the United States, in only the second trial worldwide of the 2001 suicide hijackings.

The accused, Abdelghani Mzoudi, was also cleared on a lesser charge of membership of a terrorist organisation by the court in

Hamburg, northern Germany.

"Mr Mzoudi you are acquitted. But this is not a reason to be jubilant," said presiding judge Klaus Rühle, after he had rejected a last-minute challenge from a lawyer representing some of the victims.

The 31-year-old showed no immediate reaction when the verdict was handed down.

Rühle said the court reached its decision not "because it was con-

vinced of the innocence of the accused, but because there was not enough evidence for a conviction."

"It appears that some of the preparation of the attacks was not hidden from you. However, the opposite is also possible," he said, adding that he ruled "when in doubt, in favour of the accused."

When the hearing opened, the lawyer, Andreas Schulz, urged the

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