

Pushing people to risk, defying ban

Season of storm begins but small launches ply Meghna estuary routes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BARISAL

The season of storms has set in but small and defective launches are plying the turbulent and risky routes through the Meghna estuary, defying a government ban.

Plying of small launches, trawlers and engine boats in Bholalaxmipur, Mirzakalu-Char Alexander, Daulatkhon-Char Alexander, Daulatkhon-Mozu Chowdhurirhut routes are banned from March 15 to October 15 after several disasters caused by storm

claimed numerous lives in the past few years. But the authorities and law enforcers are virtually helpless in enforcing the ban as a good number of owners of such launches are leaders of ruling and opposition parties, sources said.

On an average, 3000 to 400 passengers travel in the risky routes every day.

The small launches include M V Sagor Kanya-2, owned by State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharrif Hossain Shahjahan; MV Bhabanipur-1, MV Bhabanipur- 2

and MV Bhabanipur- 3, owned by BNP leader and Union Parishad Chairman Golam Azam Polin; MV Shahbazpur, owned by Awami League leader Mahub Mia; MV King of Alexander, owned by BNP leaders Mahmud Mia and Selim Mia and MV Siddik Khan, owned by another influential BNP leader.

Besides, allegations have it that musclemen of the private launch owners also create obstacles in movement of BIWTC (Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation) sea trucks, a safe transport in the routes.

They forcibly occupy jetties of sea trucks at different points and compel passengers to board their illegally operating vessels.

The private small launches are supposed to keep sufficient number buoys and take other safety measures. But most of them ignore those.

Talking to this correspondent, crew of some of the launches admitted that they are plying their vessels illegally.

Abdul Mannan, Manager of A Rahman and Sons, owner of Sagor Kanya-2, was visibly annoyed when asked why he is plying the launch defying the ban and risking life of passengers. "Journalists should not poke their nose in this petty matter", he told this correspondent.

BIWTC officials here, when contacted, said they have requested the administrations and police officials concerned to enforce the ban. But there has been no result, they said.



STAR FILE PHOTO

People boarding small launches bound for Meghna estuary routes, risking life.

Villagers stop Unocal's work in Bibiyana

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Villagers joined by local BNP and Awami League leaders yesterday stopped the earth work being done by US oil company Unocal for construction of a road for its South Pad in Bibiyana gas field.

They earlier held a rally at Nadampur High School ground, where the speakers said the villagers would not allow any work on their lands before payment of 'proper' compensation.

The rally was attended by people from 10 nearby villages including Mostafapur, Karimpur, Bokhtarapur, Baniun, Latifpur, Nadampur, Piripur, Kakura and Mansurpur.

After the rally, the villagers in a procession came to the site where workers engaged by Bengal Development Corporation, were doing the earthwork. The Bangladeshi company was doing the work on behalf of Unocal.

The villagers asked the workers to stop work and leave the place.

They did so, sources and witnesses said.

Seeing the procession, some Unocal officials including Bibiyana Gas Field in-charge Harry Weatherspoon left the area, the witnesses said.

The rally, chaired by Acting chairman of Inatganj Union Parishad Md Boyetullah, was addressed by, among others, local union BNP President Abul Kalam Azad, General Secretary Tofazzal Hossain, Awami League leaders Abdur Rouf, Siraj Miah and Toufique Ahmed and Upazila Krishak Dal President Afil Uddin.

Main Uddin, Prokash Uddin, Abdul Quaiyum Abdul Malik, Abdul Latif Tenu, Syed Tojommul Ali also spoke from among the land owners.

The speakers said, they are ready to sacrifice their valuable ancestral homesteads and lands for development of the gas field in the interest of the country.

But, we want proper price of lands as per law, they said.

They alleged that some government officials were trying to "cheat" the landowners in compensation payment, which will be resisted.

The government has started the process to acquire 50 acres of land in the area near Sunamganj-Aushkandi and Syedpur-Inatganj roads for development of the gas field.

The speakers said the compensation offered by the officials is lower than that paid by the same company in 1997 for lands near a riverbank.

They demanded price equal to that offered when lands were acquired for the North Pad of Bibiyana Gas Field.

When contacted, a Unocal official seeking anonymity admitted that villagers stopped the earthwork. Mentionably, Habiganj Deputy Commissioner Emdadul Haque visited the area on Sunday, assured the people of proper compensation and requested the people not to "disturb" Unocal men.

SEMINAR AT BARISAL TOLD

Pure drinking water can reduce diseases by 80 pc

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BARISAL

At least 1.25 lakh children die from water-borne diseases in the country in a year.

This was stated at seminar on Water for Life: Our Activity, held here yesterday, marking the International Water Day-2005.

The speakers said at least Tk 50 billion is spent annually for treatment of patients attacked with the diseases. The huge amount of money could be diverted to development only if supply of pure water and countrywide sanitation can be ensured, they said.

They underscored the need for launching a massive awareness campaign involving all quarters, including NGOs, to attain the goals.

The seminar was a organised jointly by Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), WHO, UNICEF and NGO Forum. It was held at the Social Welfare Department office auditorium at Kalibari in the city.

Presided over by Social Welfare Department Deputy Director M

Shawkat Md Kamal, the seminar was attended by PHED Superintending Engineer AKM Ehasanul Huq as chief guest and CARE Programme Manager IV Ray, UNICEF Divisional Chief Tarikul Alam and PHED Executive Engineer Abdul Wahaf as special guests.

Principal Dr Sunil Baran Halder presented the key-note paper. The speakers included Golam Mowla of FPAB, AVAS Director Rahima Sultana Kazol, BNDN Secretary Ranjit Dutta, journalist Kazi Mokbul Hossain, PHED Engineer Nurul Huda Chowdhury and NGO Forum officials Mashiul Alam Polash and Delwar Hossain.

Ehasanul Huq said the main challenges facing the country's health sector are arsenic contamination of groundwater, fall in water table and salinity in water in the southern districts.

Tarikul Alam said 80 per cent of the diseases in Bangladesh break out due to want pure drinking water and sanitation. This mis because of lack of awareness.

NGOs demand security

Memo to Nilphamari DC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The Nilphamari unit of Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) brought out a procession and held a rally in the town protesting bomb attacks on NGO offices here and some other places in the country in the town in the few days.

It also handed over a memorandum to the district administration demanding security of life and property of NGO workers and their offices.

The programmes followed bomb attacks on the office of ASA (Association for Social Advancement), an NGO and a BRAC health clinic in the town. The attacks created a panic among NGO workers, who apprehending more such attacks as the government did not take any step to stop such incidents.

More than 500 NGO officials and employees attended the programmes.

After parading the town streets with banners and posters, the NGO men gathered in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office and held a rally.

Speakers at the rally said NGOs in the country are working lawfully and doing a commendable job by helping the poor and bringing about socio-economic development, which is appreciated at home and abroad.

NGOs are supplementing government development efforts but a section of religious zealots in the name of religion are maligning them and trying to stop their activities, they said.

They later handed over a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner, demanding immediate steps to ensure security of their life and property of NGOs.



PHOTO: STAR

NGO workers parading Nilphamari town streets yesterday demanding security of life.



Dilruba Ahmed, Governor, Zonta International Dist. 25, addressing the function held at Rugganj.

Zonta Club helps woman weavers

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Some women's voluntary organisations in the country, led by Zonta International Club, have taken an initiative to rehabilitate 200 women Jamdani weavers in Narayangaj, Rugganj and Noapara, who were badly affected by last year's flood.

They distributed pre-fabricated houses, new looms with raw materials, sanitary latrines and other rehabilitation kits to 29 women weavers at a simple function held at Rupaganj recently. Dilruba Ahmed, Governor of Zonta International District 25, attended the function as chief guest.

The rest of the selected 200 affected women will get assistance soon.

Other women's organisations which joined hands in the effort are Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh, SAARC Women's Association, Project Five-O, Bangladesh Federation of University Women, Inner Wheel Club of Dhaka, Gulshan Ladies Club, National Association for Resource Improvement and Platform to Resist Violence Against Women.

72 BNP men quit party

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Seventy-two BNP leaders and workers of Netrakona and Jessore districts have tendered resignation from the party alleging local leaders' corruption, misuse of power and repression on people.

Our Netrakona Correspondent reports: Forty-four BNP leaders and workers of Joyka union under Karimganj upazila in Kishoreganj have resigned from party on Saturday.

They tendered their resignation jointly to Education Minister Dr Osman Faruque at his residence in Dhaka on Saturday.

Joyka union was once known as a BNP stronghold.

The joint signatories are Joyka union BNP president Azizur Rahman Bhuiya, Joyka Union Parishad (UP) chairman Md Nuruzzaman, vice presidents Masum Khan and SM Sawkat Kabir, joint secretary Hadiul Islam Dulal, assistant organising secretaries Md

Dinajpur doctors on strike

A CORRESPONDENT, DINAJPUR

Doctors, nurses and health workers in Sadar hospital, 13 upazila health complexes (UZHCs) and all private clinics here have gone on an indefinite strike from yesterday causing untold sufferings to hundreds of patients.

The wildcat strike was called by the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Dinajpur unit demanding release of their arrested colleagues, Dr Mahubul Islam and Dr Rawshan Ara, also a couple following mysterious death

of a domestic help, Insan Ara Parveen, 25, at their government quarter on Tuesday.

All classes in Dinajpur Medical College will also be suspended.

However, the emergency department of Sadar hospital will remain open for patients' treatment.

BMA called the strike at a press conference held at Dinajpur Press Club on Monday. The press conference was followed by a procession. Doctors, nurses and health workers paraded the streets of the district town chanting various slogans and demanding removal of deputy commissioner (DC) and superintendent

of police (SP). They also besieged the offices of the DC and the SP.

The couple was arrested following filing of a case by victim's father in Dinajpur Police Station (PS) on Thursday. The victim was strangled, according to the autopsy report.

Meanwhile, the physician couple lodged a case of armed robbery just after the incident. They complained to police, bandits ransacked their house and fled away with valuables after killing their domestic help.

Police produced the arrested couple to Dinajpur Judge Court, which sent them to jail.