

Most vessels in south ply without trained crew

Nexus between launch owners, BIWTA officials: Owners prefer untrained crew to pay poorly

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Defying rules, a large number of passenger launches ply the turbulent river routes in the southern districts without license-holding trained crew in the current season of storms, risking passengers' life.

At least 1000 launches ply the 28 routes in Barisal, Bhola, Patuakhali, Jhalakati, Barguna and Pirojpur districts every day and over 50 per cent of them have no licence-holding crew and trained manpower, sources said.

According to marine laws, two types of motorised water transports up to 65 feet in length and above--are allowed to carry passengers in river routes.

As per law, vessels up to 65 feet in length, registered as Motorized Launch (ML), must have at least nine trained crew, fitness certificate and route permit. Vessels above 65 feet in length, registered as Motorized Vessel (MV), should have 12 trained crew.

The manpower includes a Master, a Driver, skilled Sukanis and Lascars, all trained and certified Eby BIWTA.

But few of the crew and other staff operating the vessels have such certificates.

During an investigation at Barisal IWTA launch terminal on Saturday, this correspondent found at least 30 launches without certified Master and Driver and another 25 without either a trained Master or a Driver.

Manik Bepari, once a Master with licence from BIWTA, now runs a company styled Manik Navigation having four small launches. His son-in-law Yunus Bepari owns another company named Yunus Navigation with two launches. But none of the launches have any trained crew certified by BIWTA.

When asked how they face mobile court, Makin said, "We manage it".

Three of the six launches of Sumana Water Transport and Navin Water Navigation owned by Khorshed Mia, an influential leader of Barisal Launch Owners Association, are operating without trained drivers.

So also, MV Upadwip, MV

Upabon and ML Akram owned by Sreepur Launch Company have no trained driver, according to the Launch Workers' Association.

But when asked, Salam Kazi, one of the owners of the company, denied the allegation.

MV Parvin and MV Sagor King ply the turbulent Barisal-Bhola route but none have any trained Master and Driver.

ML Afsar, ML Hayat and ML Arafat also have no trained Driver. The two vessels have registered Masters only on records, but they never ply the vessels. Those are operated by untrained crew.

Talking to this correspondent, Golam Mawla, central president of the Launch Workers Association admitted that in last four years, two of the four major disasters claiming

several hundred lives took place as the vessels were operated by untrained crew.

The government repeatedly asked launch owners to abide by marine laws and employ skilled masters and drivers and ordered BIWTA inspectors to take action against law-breakers.

But the launch owners and inspectors have an unholy alliance, Golam Mawla claimed.

A Master having BIWTA training certificate, who is a member of the association, seeking anonymity said he is jobless for seven months as he demanded Tk 3000 salary as per labor law.

Bazlu Mia, another member of the association, said vessel owners prefer untrained crew as they can be paid less. This is done in connivance with BIWTA inspectors, he alleged.

But Abdul Malek, Marine Inspector at Barisal denied the allegation of underhand deal and negligence in duty by BIWTA mean.

"Launches capsize mainly due to storm, not for lack of skilled manpower", he said.

He however said that only 12 vessels are operating without trained manpower. Cases have been filed against those, he said.

When contacted, Saiful Islam, Barisal Port Officer In-charge, said, "We have nothing to do except lodging case.

"We have no power to stop illegal launch operation.

"For example, ML Mehdi-1 continued operating despite filing of a case", he said.

Some leaders of the Launch Workers Association alleged that BIWTA officials are responsible for all the irregularities.

A section of BIWTA officials ignore the lack of trained crew while renewing fitness certificate and route permit, they claimed.

None of the leaders of Launch Owner Association was available for comment. However, Sultan Mahmud, an owner, acknowledged the irregularities but said the number of defaulters are few.

BDR on alert in Dinajpur

20 push-in bids in a week

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) is on alert along the 132 kilometre border in northern districts including Dinajpur following several push-in bids by BSF in the last few days.

Lt. Col. Abu Bakkar, Commanding Officer of 15 Rifles Battalion, told The Daily Star yesterday that BSF of Kamdevpur camp tried to push in at least four Indians including two women into Bangladesh through Phulbari border in Dinajpur Sadar upazila at around midnight Friday.

BDR personnel along with villagers foiled the bid.

Again, on Saturday night, BSF tried to push in one man and one woman along the Kamdevpur-Manipur border by opening the barbed wire fencing.

Seeing the bid, BDR hoisted red flag, warning BSF. The drama continued for about two hours.

In view of repeated push-in bids, BDR has been put on alert along 80 km border under Phulbari 15 Rifles Battalion, 40 km under 14 Rifles Battalion and 12 km under 29 Rifles Battalion.

BDR sources said they foiled at least 20 push-in bids by BSF in the last seven days.

AL MP sues party men in Nilpahamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Awami League lawmaker from Domar-Dimla constituency Hamida Banu Shova has lodged a case against a leader of her party and another of its student front, Chhatra League.

On behalf of Shova, Jubo League leader Halim Haider filed the case with Domar thana on Friday against Abul Kalam Azad, general secretary of Sonarai union Awami League and Farhad Azad, sports secretary of Nilphamari district Chhatra League.

In the FIR, it is alleged that some hoodlums led by the two demolished the dais and hurled abuses at her when she went to hold a party workers meeting at Dukduki Barogachha village in Domar upazila on March 22.

When contacted over phone yesterday, the lawmaker said hoodlums and trouble mongers should be punished. The incident has created resentment in AL and its front organisations in the district.



PHOTO: STAR

The monument at Nishbetganj near Rangpur Cantonment, built in memory of martyrs who sacrificed their lives during siege of the cantonment in 1970.

Rangpur cantt siege day today

Celebration includes rally, cultural functions by indigenous people

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

The townspeople, joined by indigenous people from different northern districts will observe the 'cantonment gherao (siege) day here today

Several thousand indigenous people, mainly Santals, are expected to attend the day-long programmes including rallies, processions and Santal cultural functions, being organised by Uttar Bangla Adibasi Lahanti Network (network of NGOs of indigenous people) in Rangpur

town.

Bhagobot Tudu, president of Adibasi Lahanti Network, will preside over the rally to be held at the foot of Rokto Gourab, a memorial built for the martyrs at Nishbetganj beside Rangpur cantonment.

Besides Santals, different social organisations and political parties including Awami League and Rangpur unit of the Freedom Fighters Association will also hold programmes on the day at Nishbetganj.

On March 28 in 1970, thou-

sands of people from Mithapukur, Boldipukur, Baderganj, Ranipukur, Manzais, Tapat, Palichara, Ramzibon, Bonga, Lalbag, Goneshpur, Domdama, Damuderpur and Pathanpara in Rangpur including Santals carrying sticks, bows and arrows laid a siege to Rangpur cantonment.

The Pakistani occupation army opened fire from inside the cantonment, killing an unspecified number of freedom-loving people.

The day is observed in Rangpur every year since 1971 to pay homage to the martyrs.

Fresh probe into Tanore gang-rape begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) yesterday began probing the sensational 17-year-old gang-rape case in Tanore upazila.

CID Inspector Abul Kalam Biswas, investigating officer (IO) of the case, recorded statements of the victim at Rajshahi office of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), where the victim was under safe custody.

A Magistrate court asked CID to probe the case following a higher court order for re-investigation.

However, the victim's lawyers and family members told newsmen yesterday that the main accused in the case--Tanore upazila BNP Vice-president and Chanduria UP Chairman Mofiz Uddin threatened witnesses in the case and her family members 'to kill or harass them through false cases' if they proceed with the case.

"Mofiz threatened the witnesses even in front of policemen including

the IO on March 23 when CID police was visiting the victim's house", said Korban Ali, the victim's husband adding.

"Police just humbly rebuked Mofiz for the threat", he said.

Victim's lawyer Advocate Hasibur Rahman Hasibul said, "I apprehend that the rapists may get police favour as our men saw police talking to Mofiz inside Tanore thana and a CID police even took lunch at Mofiz's house".

Two accused in the case--Omar Ali and Yaad Ali--who were arrested after The Daily Star published a report on December 13 that the victim was on the run for life following threats by rapists, were freed on bail on January 26.

Lawyers said, the two got bail as police arrested them under Section 54 and charged them for only threatening the victim, not for raping her. Regarding another accused--Abdul MoziidTanore thana OC Nurul Amin said that he went into hiding.

The victim earlier alleged that four BNP men--Mofiz, Omar, Yaad and

village doctor Abdul Moziid gang-raped her on April, 1988 when she was 18. Bribed by rapists, her uncle late Sayed Ali Satani lodged a case with Tanore Police Station accusing Muhammad Ali of the rape. But at the court, the victim told that four BNP were the rapists, not Ali.

Later, in course of time, the documents of the case were missing and the probe was suspended for over nine years.

Talking to The Daily Star, CID Inspector Abul Kalam Biswas said that the rapists would be arrested after the victim renews her allegations in a statement before a Magistrate under Section 164.

"I met Mofiz only once last week. I didn't saw him threatening the witnesses, but I heard about threats from victim's family members", Biswas said when asked about the allegations.

Replying to a question, he said Mofiz is free to move as he was granted bail by the High Court.

Investigation into 'police abuse' of Rajshahi women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Higher police officials yesterday started probing the allegations that a police team from Mothar thana abused female members of a family at Harian Kazipara while searching for a criminal there.

Assistant Commissioner Ashraf of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, who has been asked to submit a report within three days, told this correspondent after visiting the scene that the family concerned did not filed any complaint.

Deputy Commissioner (west) Lokman Hakim said stern action would be taken against the policemen if they are found guilty.

A police team had gone there at about 3 am on Friday to arrest Nur Amin, a suspect in Sadek Ali murder case.

Not finding him, police caught Amin's brother Shariful, but the family members resisted when police were

taking him out of the house.

At one stage of the scuffle between police and the family members, police tore apart the dress of Razia, Amin's wife and assaulted others including Runa, Tahura, Latifa, Syamoli and Bely, it was alleged.

"Policemen humiliated us and almost stripped me. My sisters-in-law protested the police attack on me. We were not against Amin's arrest. We protested arrest of Shariful who has no criminal record", said Razia.

Sub-inspector Khater Ali who led the raid claimed that female members of Amin's family held several policemen by the waist while they were taking away Shariful from the house.

"Policemen retaliated after one woman beat constable Liaquat with stick and hurled abuses. They also called us dacoits", said Khater.

Police however returned safe from the village at the intervention of the village elders.

'Protect child rights, stop trafficking'



PHOTO: STAR

Participants at the orientation course on child rights, held at Satkhira yesterday. It was organised by World Vision, Bangladesh, Swadesh, Bangladesh Vision, CDOW and GDF.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Government officials, people's representatives, NGO men and civil society representatives in the small bordering town have joined hands with a noble aim--to protect child rights and trafficking.

At an orientation course on protecting children's rights and creating awareness in the town yesterday, they vowed to play their due role to ensure rights children irrespective of their social status.

It was jointly organised by World Vision, Bangladesh, an NGO and some community-based organisations including Swadesh, Bangladesh Vision, CDOW (Coastal Development Organisation for Women) and GDF (Gender Development Forum).

World Vision's Satkhira chapter Manager Peter Costa presided over the meeting while Satkhira Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ilias was the chief guest.

Satkhira Police Superintendent Abdur Rahim, Pourasava Chairman Sheikh Ashraf Haque, Civil

Surgeon Dr Md Abu Aziz Al Munsur and Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) were special guests.

It was addressed by, among others, journalist Kalyan Bannerjee, Agardari UP Chairman Abdur Rahman, Advocate Farida Akhtar Banu and Bakal High School Headmaster Mahfuzur Rahman. They stressed the need for united efforts by the government, socio-cultural organisations, NGOs and civil society members to protect rights of children and resist child trafficking.

They stressed education for all, particularly the poor, and poverty alleviation to check child trafficking and ensure their rights. The meeting resolved to chalk out a joint programme to create awareness among the people.

They called upon government officials to play their due role to safeguard children's rights in line with the Child Rights Convention of the United Nations.

New laws should be enacted to ban hazardous jobs for children, they suggested.