

# High currents halt salvage, 29 more bodies found

150 still missing in Jamuna; 30 feared drowned as boat sinks in Meghna

STAR REPORT

Salvage operations of the sunken launch in the Jamuna river were delayed by strong currents and setbacks yesterday, including a snapped rescue wire, as hopes faded for more than 150 people feared drowned.

By yesterday evening, 29 floating bodies had been retrieved downstream of the spot near Arichaghat in Manikganj, raising the death toll to 33.

In Bhola, some 30 people went missing after a trawler with around 100 passengers on board sank in the Meghna river near Char Maheshkhali last night amidst stormy weather, our correspondent reports from Barisal.

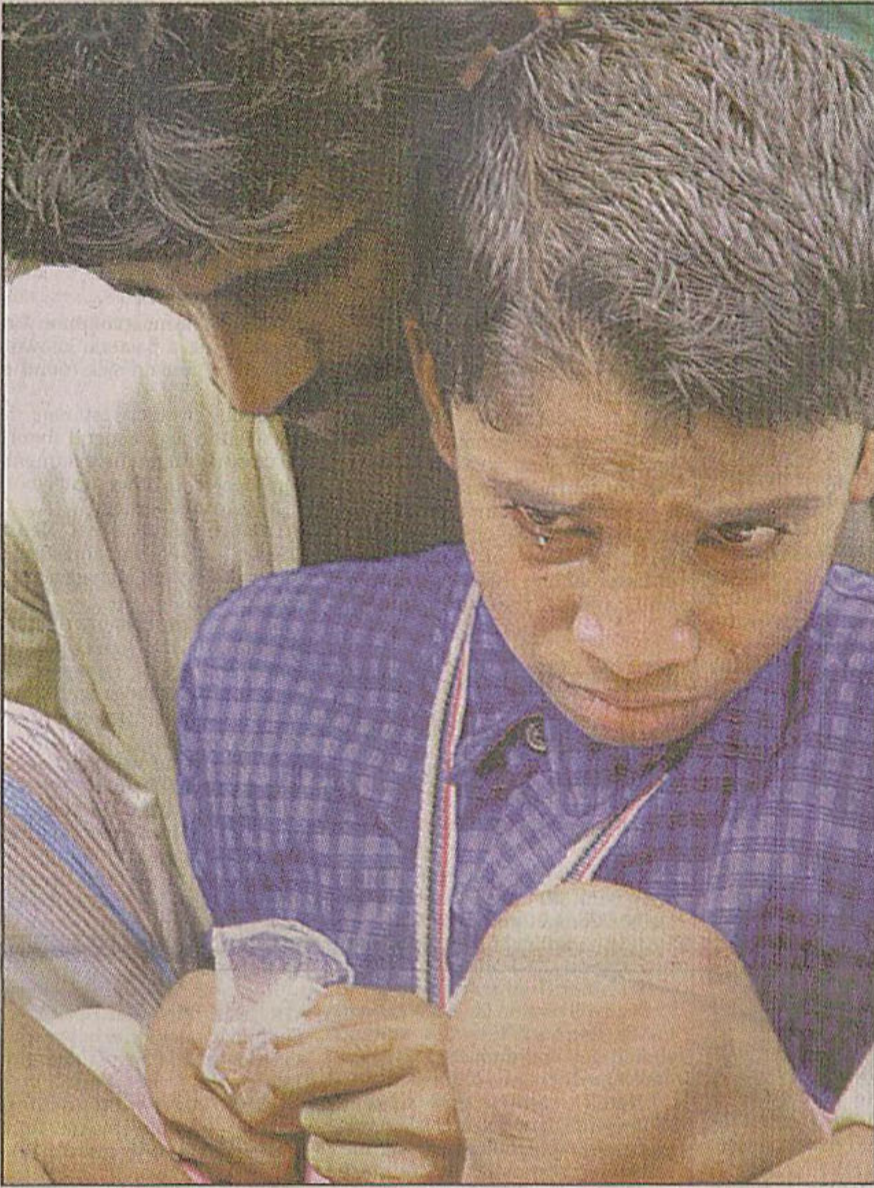
The Char Zahiruddin-bound trawler, also loaded with 70 maunds of rice, capsized at about 8:30pm. Some 70 passengers swam ashore and the rest were missing.

Twenty-two divers took part in the rescue efforts in the Jamuna yesterday. One of them said he saw bodies trapped inside the vessel but could not reach them due to the heavy currents. The ferry is now at least 30 feet under water and partly covered by sands, he said.

Efforts to refloat the ferry began in the early morning, after the rescue vessel, MV Rustam, was initially delayed by bad weather. But stormy weather and strong currents have so far frustrated the effort, particularly after a wire intended to help lift out the vessel snapped in mid-operation.

"Batting the strong current, our divers could tie the vessel but we could not lift it out as the metal wire tore off. We have ordered for a new wire that is supposed to reach here

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WHEN SHOCK MAKES HIM MUTE... Sajib, who lost his brother to the launch sinking in Jamuna, sits like a statue by the river with his uncle yesterday.

PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL

# AL won't go to polls with KM Hasan as caretaker chief: Hasina

BDNEWS, Cox's Bazar

Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the ruling four-party alliance government wants to appoint their favourite person as the chief of the caretaker government to manipulate the results of the next general elections.

In an oblique reference to the former chief justice KM Hasan, the Awami League (AL) chief said that her party would not take part in the elections if he was appointed as the chief of the next caretaker government.

"He is a relative of one of the killers of Bangabandhu and was the former international affairs secretary of the BNP," said Hasina.

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# 50 wounded as JCD groups clash at RU

VC accused of aiding pro-Shibir JCD group, cops rough up journalist

ANWAR ALI and ABU KALAM, Rajshahi

At least 50 people including a journalist were injured and six teachers assaulted in clashes between the rival factions of pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) over domination of the workers' council on Rajshahi University (RU) campus yesterday.

The trouble started at around 11:00am when the faction led by former RU general secretary Aslam Reza protested the JCD central committee leaders calling the

expelled JCD leader Rafique-ul-Islam onto the stage while the council was underway at Kazi Nazrul Islam auditorium.

Rafique, ex-organising secretary of the JCD's RU unit, who leads the rival group, was expelled last year on charges of being addicted to drug and his involvement in violence.

"We cannot allow a terrorist and pro-Islami Chhatra Shibir leader like Rafique in our organisation," shouted a JCD activist at the central leaders.

The council plunged into chaos

as the feuding factions grappled with each other, only to be driven out of the auditorium by the central leaders. The rowdy activists picked up from where they had left and fought one another with bricks and sticks at several points on the campus and blasted two crackers before the police.

The auditorium, RU Press Club, makeshift stores around the scene of the trouble and a motorcycle were badly damaged during the sporadic violence.

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# Dhaka, Hanoi eye \$100m trade by 2008

Joint communiqué signed

UNB, Hanoi

Bangladesh and Vietnam have agreed to set a target of \$100 million for bilateral trade volume by 2008.

This was revealed in a 16-point joint communiqué issued yesterday, the last day of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's three-day official visit to Vietnam.

On Wednesday, Khaleda Zia had official talks with her Vietnamese counterpart Phan Van Khai at the Government Office.

The two sides agreed to promote the signing of the agreement on direct payment between the central

banks of the two countries at the earliest.

The two sides also identified specific areas for promotion of trade between the two countries that would include pharmaceuticals, garment accessories, jute, leather, cement, agricultural equipment and wooden furniture.

Earlier, the two prime ministers agreed that there are ample scope to increase the present volume of bilateral trade by harnessing untapped potentials.

They agreed to activate and hold the first meeting of the Bangladesh-Vietnam joint commission on economics, culture, and science and technology in order to work out the roadmap for bilateral cooperation in all fields.

The two prime ministers discussed the scope and opportunities for joint venture investment in the

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# UK envoy wants top priority to grenade attack probes

UNB, Dhaka

British High Commissioner in Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury has called for giving top priority to concluding all the high-profile investigations into grenade attacks, which he said have a stake on Bangladesh's image abroad.

"Those attackers must be brought to justice. It must be given the highest priorities because I feel, perhaps not unduly, it does have a huge impact on Bangladesh's image abroad, and that is a shame," he told diplomatic correspondents at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Choudhury, himself a victim of one of the grenade attacks, which occurred in Sylhet on May 21 last year, expressed his disappointment about the progress of investigation and said Britain would continue to help Bangladesh government combat terrorism.

"Terrorism affects us all. It is not a problem of Bangladesh; it is not a problem of my country—it is a global problem," said the Bangladeshi-born British high commissioner.

"If Bangladesh believes that it does not have international terrorists, it is lucky. If it is believed that it is immune from international terrorism, it must be the only country in the world that it is," he told the journalists in his diplomatic manner of speech.

During the one and a half hour 'DIPLOMAT TALK' organised by the Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh (DCAB), the high commissioner explained his government's positions on Dhaka-London bilateral relations, starting from democracy to development and trade to terrorism.

In reply to a question, Choudhury said it is "absolutely

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# Shady deals of oil for food

RAFIQ HASAN, back from Chittagong

It was Thursday (May 12) afternoon when the MT Madina, a private oil tanker traveling from Chittagong to Dhaka, cruised the channel between Char Zahiruddin and Char Alexander.

As the shipmaster reduced the speed of the tanker, two engine boats attached themselves to its sides, and six men came on board. They quickly handed over chickens and hilsha fish to the ship crew, in what seemed a well rehearsed exchange, and then began siphoning petrol from the ship's hull, filling about six containers in all, which they loaded onto their waiting boats.

When they noticed the presence of this correspondent on the ship, the staff ordered the men to stop

siphoning oil from the tanker, which had been carrying around 1,200 tonnes of oil refined at the government-owned Eastern Refinery in Chittagong.

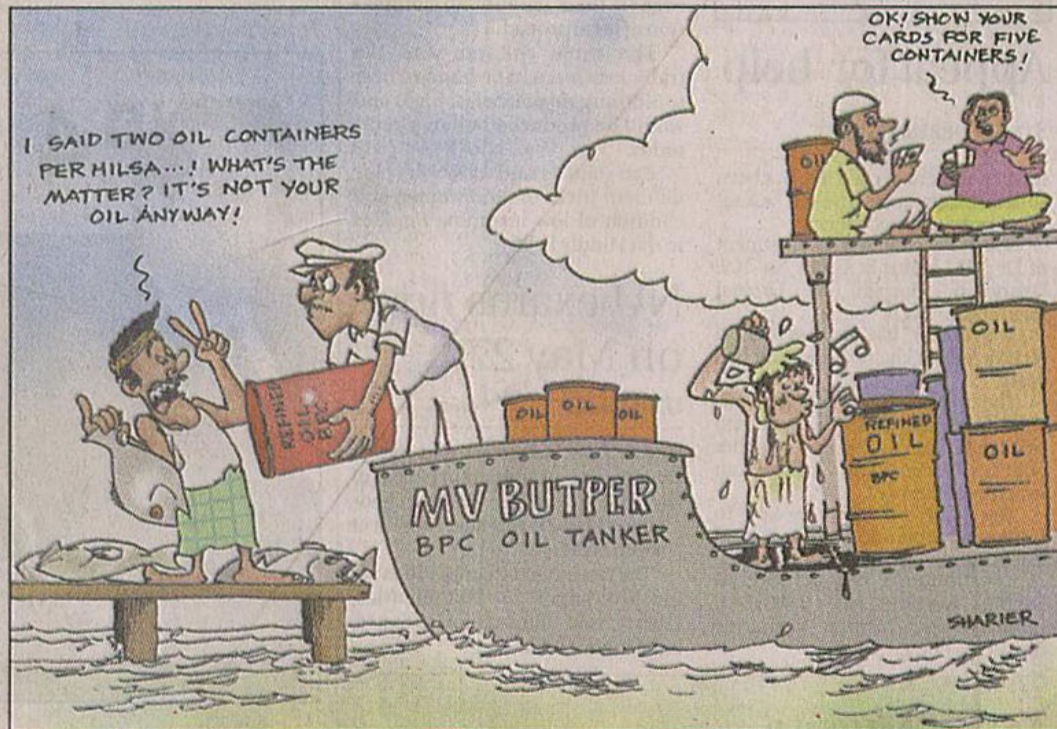
Finally the men left, each of their containers carrying more than 30 liters of oil, worth roughly Tk 6,000 in all.

AN OLD AND OPEN SECRET ON DARK WATERS

Ship crewmembers, ministry officials and others say the siphoning of government oil like this is part and parcel of a tanker's voyage, an open secret on the waters between Dhaka and Chittagong, where more than ten such tankers, each carrying over 1,000 metric tons of oil, sail every day.

They described that their river

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# ELECTORAL REFORMS CEC to give proposals to president tomorrow

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The outgoing Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed will submit a five-point reform proposal to the president on Saturday, aiming to strengthen the Election Commission (EC) and the electoral system.

The proposals include setting up of an independent secretariat for the EC and introduction of electronic voting machine.

Syed will also suggest fresh rules on the deployment of army and formation of electoral enquiry committees for the local government elections.

The CEC will meet President Iajuddin Ahmed on Saturday, the last working day of his five-year tenure that will expire on Sunday (May 22), and submit the reform proposal which he finalised this week.

"We want to improve the existing electoral system. I will submit the proposal to the president and a copy of the proposal will be sent to the

prime minister also for the government's consideration," Syed told journalists yesterday at the EC yesterday.

The proposals are --- an independent secretariat for the EC and a separate cadre service for its secretariat, introduction of electronic voting machine and electronic voter roll, army deployment in the city corporation and municipality polls, and introduction of electoral enquiry committee system in these polls.

The proposals are going to be placed at a time when the mainstream opposition parties and the civil society are calling for reforms in the caretaker government system and the EC. The opposition parties are also seeking an independent secretariat for the EC.

WHY INDEPENDENT SECRETARIAT

The EC has stressed the need for an independent secretariat as it on numerous occasions in the past had faced difficulties in conducting polls

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