



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Relatives and boatmen brave a turbulent Jamuna yesterday to take the bodies of two victims of Tuesday's Aricha launch disaster to their homes in Pabna. Seventeen more bodies were recovered from the river yesterday pushing the death toll to 50.

Govt plans to buy 2 more rescue ships

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With ferry disasters becoming a common phenomenon that claim hundreds of lives every year, the government plans to buy two high-powered rescue ships, as age-old Rustam and Hamza can no longer lift the sunken vessels.

The new salvage ships with latest technologies and automated systems will be able to lift 400 tonnes each and detect sunken vessels, sources said.

The cost of the two ships will be no less than Tk 143 crore, and the government is willing to buy those through a long-term easy loan, they added.

They said the government is corresponding with the South Korean government and also trying

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No rescue, only floating bodies recovered

Death toll in Jamuna tragedy rises to 50; over 130 still missing; 10 drown in Bhola mishap

STAR REPORT

Seventeen more bodies were recovered yesterday from the Jamuna river downstream Arichaghat in Manikganj, raising the death toll to 50 in Tuesday's launch tragedy as salvage operation for the vessel was further delayed by strong currents and snapping of the rescue wire again.

Police recovered the decomposed bodies floating in the river and continued their search boarding country boats as more than 130 passengers of the launch -- MV

Raipura-- were still missing and feared drowned.

In Thursday's trawler sinking in Bhola, 10 people drowned and at least 20 went missing as the vessel with around 100 people on board capsized in the Meghna river near Char Maheshkhali in stormy weather. About 70 of them swam ashore, our correspondent reports from Barisal.

It was the third river vessel tragedy in the country only in five days with the second occurring in Patuakhali on Sunday.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority's (BIWTA) rescue team yesterday continued its operation in the Jamuna with the decades-old salvage vessel M V Rustam without success. Twenty-two divers taking part in the operation could not reach the sunken launch due to heavy currents in the river, BIWTA officials said.

"The rescue wire snapped for the second time during a storm at noon. Our efforts to hook the sunken launch to lift it failed repeatedly as

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Rupsha bridge opens to traffic today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia inaugurates today the Khanjahan Ali Bridge across the river Rupsha, meeting a long felt need for providing a permanent road link with Khulna-Mongla highway and convenient communications between the country's northwest and southwest regions.

With the opening of the 1.36km long bridge constructed at a cost of Tk 726.15 crore with financial assistance of the government of Japan, operations in the country's second largest port city Mongla is likely to get a boost along with development of communications in the region.

Following inauguration of the bridge at 2:45pm, Khaleda Zia will address over 2,000 invitees there, official sources said.

The inaugural function of the bridge will also be addressed by Shuzen Tanigawa, senior vice-minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Communications

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Another bout of AL hartal today

HSC exams postponed; 11-party, Oikya Mancha withdraw support

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ignoring requests from different quarters, the main opposition Awami League (AL) is all set to enforce another dawn-to-dusk nationwide hartal today, in protest against the killing of its city unit leader Khorshed Alam Bachchu, forcing the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations postponed.

Today's shutdown comes just after two days' respite since Wednesday's hartal called for the same cause resulting in the post

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If no justice, hartal is a must: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Sheikh Hasina yesterday said hartal becomes unavoidable as the government continues "killing" her party members and victims are denied justice.

"Why will we not call hartal? If we don't get justice, hartal is a must," the Awami League (AL) chief told a function organised to distribute prizes among the winners of a children's drawing competition on the premises of the Bangabandhu Museum, marking Bangabandhu's

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ORDEALS OF 2 MINOR DOMESTIC HELPS

Too feeble to speak out, too young to go home

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and PORIMOL PALMA

Two girl children, driven by extreme poverty to work as domestic helps, ended up last week in Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) with bruises all over the body.

Pakhi Noor, 9, and Meena, 8, were lucky to escape the brutal tortures and abuses by their employers but now, at the end of that ordeal, they face a new crisis: Taken from home at a very tender age, neither remembers where her family lives.

With nowhere to go, and with horrendous wounds still to be nursed, their stories illustrate the typical fate of poor girls forced into bondage at an early age in appalling abusive conditions.

PAKHI IN FETTERS

The ordeal of Pakhi reached a tipping point after a simple mishap: She lost a set of keys. As punishment for the mistake, her employer, Mahmuda Binte Atique alias Ratna, beat her and then turned her out of the Moddha Basabo house in Sabujbag.

"You can enter my house only after you find the keys," Ratna warned the 9-year-old kid before dumping her outside the gate, Pakhi recalled recently lying in a bed at DMCH.

Following complaints from neighbours, the police rescued Pakhi from in front of the gate and took her to DMCH. They then arrested and filed a case against Ratna under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act. Ratna was sent to jail on May 11.

Doctors at DMCH said Pakhi's

body is a demonstration of abuse. The numerous black spots on her hands, legs and back, they said, clearly indicate serious torture. "Her skin diseases also show that she lived in a very shabby condition and without any care at her employer's house," they added.

Bitterer are the lingering mental scars that do not show. Pakhi is so frightened of her employer, she screams in panic whenever anyone approaches her bed, saying, "No...no...I won't go...I won't go...to Ratna's house."

Worst of all, the child cannot remember the name of her home district and has no way to contact

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News analysis

Extra-judicial killings call for unbiased probe

SHAMIM ASHRAF

Rights bodies and legal experts have said an executive probe into extra-judicial killings in so-called crossfire, shootouts and encounters is not sufficient and demanded an independent inquiry involving the judiciary and professional bodies.

Many have dismissed as mere eyewash an executive inquiry into the actions of the police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) that have left 408 people killed since June last year. They maintain such an enquiry will not be neutral since the law-enforcers are carrying out the acts

with the go-ahead from the government.

"A man cannot be the judge of his own cause" is a universal maxim for dispensing justice. If only executive probe is done on the crossfire, it will be against this maxim," Justice Golam Rabbani, a retired judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, told The Daily Star on May 12.

There must be a judicial inquiry into the incidents to satisfy the victims' relatives and the public at large, he said.

"Especially in our country, people are suspicious about the sincerity of

the executive authority. This is a sad fact," Justice Rabbani added.

According to the heads of the police and Rab, they did not find any unjustified use of firearms by their own men in the incidents that left 'criminals' killed to this day.

In the wake of strong criticism from home and abroad for flouting the constitution and the international human rights norms by allowing killings in so-called crossfire, the cabinet committee on law and order said on May 11 that an executive investigation would be conducted into every such incident.

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No clue yet to killers of Khorshed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The family of slain Awami League (AL) leader Khorshed Alam Bachchu loses confidence in police probe, as the investigators have yet to find any clue to the murderers even after four days into the killing.

"We have left it all to almighty Allah," Shahin Akhtar Jharna, Khorshed's sister-in-law, yesterday said referring to probe into the slaying.

The investigators, however, expressed confidence that they will be able to solve the murder case that was filed by Khorshed's wife Jahan Akhtar. "We are hopeful that we will soon solve the case," said Investigation Officer (IO) Fazlul Kabir of Detective Branch of police yesterday.

Advocate Khorshed Alam, the

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Surge in investments may double earning of EPZs

SHARIER KHAN

Investment in export processing zones (EPZs) has shot up significantly in the last two years -- mainly in anticipation of the post-MFA context -- creating the prospect of doubling in the next fiscal year. The EPZ's existing annual earning of 1.5 billion US dollars.

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (Bepza), which currently has 215 export units in six operating EPZs, said that as many as 96 units received approval in these zones between July 2003 and March 2005. These will invest US 375.75 million dollars and employ 64,000 people.

Of these newly approved units, 43 are dedicated to garments and its backward linkage units, and 17 to agro processing units. More

applications of investors are waiting in the pipeline, Bepza officials say.

Presently there are 106 garment, textile, accessories and knitting units at the EPZs --most of them controlled by South Korean and Bangladeshi investors.

Bepza Chairman Brig Gen (retd) Zakir Hossain says that about 100 export units will come in to operation within the next fiscal year. Considering the history of the EPZs, this number is very significant.

"There are two main reasons why there is a sudden surge of investors' interest," Bepza Chairman Hossain notes, "Number one is our labour cost is still one of the lowest in the world. Number two is Bangladesh now gets duty free access to the European Union and Canada."

Explaining how the duty free access to the EU and Canada attracts investors, he said, "A Canadian factory is fully relocating itself in Bangladesh in a few months investing 25 million dollars because they used to pay a 19 percent duty for marketing their products in Canada. When they start production in Bangladesh and export the same to Canada, they will not have to pay any duty. Plus, their production cost will also go down."

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