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PLEASURE TRIP TURNS SOUR ON THE BURIGANGA 4 drown, 10 missing as picnickers go berserk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people drowned and 10 others including a minor girl went missing in the Buriganga after clashes involving two groups of picnickers and Ansars on board a launch at Sadarghat last night.

Of the four, Shanto, Javed, and Shaheen were businessmen from old Dhaka while identity of the other could not be known.

The divers of Fire Service and Civil Defence recovered the four bodies and were scouring the area for more as of filing this report at 2:00am.

A three-member probe body

was formed to investigate the incident," said Additional Superintendent of Police (Dhaka circle) Mohammad Nozmul Hossain told the Daily Star.

The fight broke out at 4:00pm when the launch 'MV-New Sun-4' carrying the pleasure trippers reached near Meghna Bridge on its way back to Sadarghat. Around 35 youths split into two groups brawled over some female members of the picnic party.

Most of them were drunk, a member of the musical band hired for the tour told The Daily Star.

The launch pulled up in midstream

at 5:00pm for the feuding youths to patch things up but to no effect.

Soon after the first clash, six to seven of one group left the launch near Postagola by a boat. Before leaving, they threatened the others that they would have dire consequences.

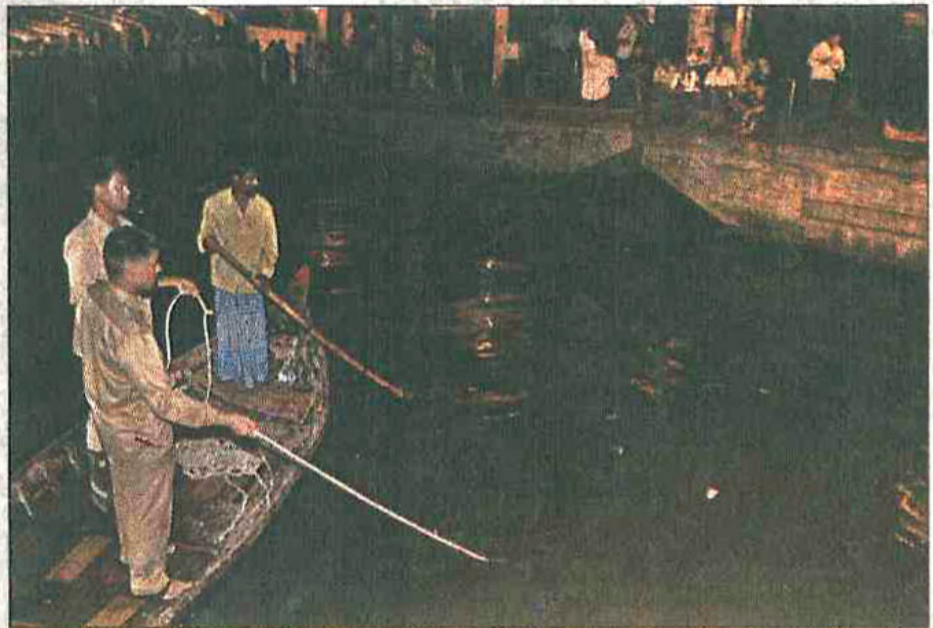
As soon as the launch reached Sadarghat terminal at 7:45pm a gang of 25 people swooped on the passengers on the deck. As they beat up the picnickers indiscriminately, everyone ran helter-skelter for cover. Soon the Ansars charged baton to disperse the rowdy crowd.

At that time, many including girls jumped into the water to escape the melee. When some of them tried to get on three small boats floating nearby, the boats overturned.

The rescue operation started at around 9:00pm, Selim Newaj Bhuiyan, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star.

"The launch with around 200 people mostly businessmen from Dholaikhal left for a pleasure trip on Meghna at 11:30am," said Nahid, one of the picnic-goers.

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Divers search for picnickers missing in the Buriganga after yesterday's tripartite clashes, left, and a mother waits on her son's body. At least four bodies were recovered after the incident.



PHOTO: STAR

Four university, college students feared drowned

A CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Four university and college students were feared drowned while taking bath in the Padma at Louhojong yesterday.

The students are Fazul Karim Ivan, 20, first year student of Marketing at Dhaka University, Shukhawat Hossain Linkon, 20, first year student of Business Administration at East-West University, Morshed Khan, 20 and Saiful Islam, 20, first year students of Kabi Nazrul Islam College.

Nine students reached Mawa at Louhojong at 3:30pm. While taking bath in the river, four of them went missing. Being informed by other students, the law enforcers along with fire service and Civil Defence personnel rushed to the spot and started a search for the missing students.

The search operation was going on as of 9:00pm yesterday.

SCORCHING HEAT Rush of patients at hospitals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An outbreak of diarrhoea and other diseases due to the scorching heat of midsummer is causing a huge rush of patients at different hospitals of the capital.

More than 500 patients suffering from diarrhoea and other diseases were admitted to the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease and Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) till yesterday noon.

Doctors on duty said usually during the period of April-May and August-October the number of patients rises and sometimes doubles, which was expected to cross 700 by 4:00pm yesterday giving an indication of an outbreak.

The patients admitted yesterday were mostly labourers, an

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PHOTO: STAR

The ICDDR,B at Mohakhali in the capital witnessed a surge of patients in the wake of a heat wave. Most hospital doctors and staff could not take their weekly off-day yesterday to cope with the situation.

C'wealth chief urges Dhaka for roadmap to credible polls

18 months too much time: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon has expressed his hope that political parties in Bangladesh will play a constructive role in supporting a peaceful environment for the conduct of credible elections.

McKinnon met Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina on Thursday as part of his ongoing interaction with Bangladesh's political leaders.

Hasina will return home on May 7 by Ethad Airlines, sources said. The plane is supposed to land at the Zia International Airport around 4:00pm.

Earlier, the Commonwealth secretary-general visited Bangladesh in March and emphasised the need for holding credible elections in Bangladesh as soon as possible during his meetings with caretaker government representatives and

political parties. According to a press release available on the Commonwealth Secretariat website, McKinnon stressed that the caretaker government must keep the people of Bangladesh informed.

"In this context, he called for the government to put out a roadmap leading up to inclusive and credible elections. Since then the government has committed itself to elections no later than the end of 2008," said the press release.

In his discussions with Hasina, McKinnon reaffirmed the Commonwealth's support for elections and the return to parliamentary government in Bangladesh as expeditiously as possible.

He also recognised that there were issues that needed to be addressed in organising these elections and ensuring a sustainable democracy in Bangladesh.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Militants regrouping, three bodies unite under single banner

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) cadres are regrouping along with the fellow militants of Insaaf and Allar Dal to see through the job of establishing Islamic law in the country.

According to intelligence sources and information obtained from detainees, the three outfits are now operating under a single banner whose name changes too frequently to keep track of it.

Determined to make up for the loss of their spearheads, they have launched a fresh recruitment drive stealthily, said an intelligence official seeking anonymity.

In a secret ballot immediately after the president had turned down the clemency pleas of militant leader Abdur Rahman and his deputies, the JMB, its offshoot Allar Dal, and Insaaf, a group led by an Ahle Hadith faction, elected Moulana Sayeedur Rahman alias

Abu Jafar as their ameer (commander).

In a series of meetings, they reconstituted a six-member Majlis-e-Shura (highest policy-making body) and appointed nine chiefs for as many operational divisions.

Besides, the militant remnants vowed to take up the job where it was left off by the executed JMB top brass. They set police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), judges, Ahmadiyya mosques and NGOs as prime targets for attacks.

Abdur Rahman, Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai and four others were hanged on March 29 for killing two judges in Jhalakathi in 2005.

Intelligence officials have gathered that the militants have plans to blast less powerful bombs and carry out the main attack when the law enforcers will be busy at the first explosion site.

Despite knowing this beforehand, the law enforcers could not

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Winning a long legal battle not enough for Wahed!

PORIMOL PALMA

Even after winning a long legal battle, an employee of the Directorate of Land Records and Survey (DLRS) is still waiting for his back pay.

Although many directives have been issued to clear the back pay of Khandaker Abdul Wahed, a retired proof-reader of the Settlement Press, DLRS has yet to pay him about Tk 5 lakh that it owes him.

"Since 1977, I have been facing false cases which destroyed the financial standing of my family. I lost almost everything bearing the expenses of the cases and simultaneously providing for my family of 10," Wahed said.

DLRS suspended Abdul Wahed following a criminal case filed with Tejgaon police station in 1977 against him and eight other employees of the same office. Wahed was eventually acquitted by the High Court

(HC) in 1984.

He then officially asked DLRS to reinstate him in his job. In 1985, his office again filed a departmental case against him with the Second Munsif Court of Dhaka. The court in its verdict termed the case illegal saying that the HC had already acquitted Wahed.

DLRS then challenged the verdict, which also ended up in the HC. In 1991, the HC upheld the lower court's verdict.

In the meantime, while Wahed was busy pursuing these legal tangles in courts, he had passed his retirement age in 1988.

Finally on February 25, 1995, DLRS accepted Wahed's request for reinstatement and withdrew his suspension, Wahed told The Daily Star.

The same year, his office paid him his back pay for the period from the time of his suspension in 1977 to

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Abdul Wahed: Will fortune at all smile on him?

Owner of Gazi Tank picked up from residence

Hasina aide held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed men identifying themselves as members of the joint forces picked up Gazi Golam Dastagir, owner of Gazi Tank, from his residence in the city in the early hours yesterday.

However, no law enforcement agency confirmed the arrest of Gazi Golam Dastagir as of 9:30pm yesterday.

Sources said some armed men in civil dress reached the residence of Dastagir, vice-president of Bangladesh Cricket Board, at Siddheswari in two pick-up vans and a motorbike at 12:30am and picked him up.

Family sources said Dastagir was picked up when he was alone

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Today's issue of The Daily Star includes a new page 'Star Books Review'. The page will come out every Saturday.

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