

# 27 killed as cargo ship rams launch

Over a dozen still missing; capsized vessel salvaged

RAFIQUL ISLAM, BARISAL

Twenty seven bodies were recovered and more than a dozen are still missing after an overcrowded launch, being hit by a cargo vessel, sank in the Kirtonkhola in Barisal yesterday.

The launch was carrying over 100 passengers, sources said.

Witnesses said 35 to 40 people managed to swim ashore from mid-river. The river is about half-a-km wide at the spot, near Beltola-Charabandi Khéya Ghat. They said many drowned trying to swim to the shore.

Rescue vessels of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) pulled out the launch ML Fahmida Happy Express around 5:00pm, about 11 hours after it went down.

Anxious relatives, amid hundreds of onlookers, were waiting on the riverbank looking for their loved ones. Many were grieving the loss of their dear ones.

Hayatul Islam, assistant commissioner of Barisal Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star around 8:45pm yesterday that 27 bodies were recovered.

BIWTA divers suspended their search around 6:30pm due to poor light. Police

and fire service officials, however, kept searching for bodies and survivors till 10:30pm. They are to resume their search this morning.

Like other such accidents, the operator of the launch and BIWTA officials could not say exactly how many people were onboard the vessel as tickets were not sold to all passengers.

A three-member enquiry committee headed by Abdullah Al Baki, additional district magistrate, was formed to investigate the incident, said Deputy Commissioner of Barisal Mushfiq Ahmed

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A rescue vessel of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority pulls the capsized launch ML Fahmida Happy Express out of the Kirtonkhola in Barisal yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: STAR

## FORGERY CASE BNP lawmaker Harun lands in jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected a bail petition from BNP lawmaker Harunur Rashid and sent him to jail after he surrendered before the court and sought bail in a forgery case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rashed Kabir passed the order after the lawmaker from Chandpur-4 constituency appeared before the court with his lawyer Advocate Golam Mostafa Khan.

Another BNP leader from Chandpur Mohammad Abdul Hannan filed the case against Rashid with Ramna Police station on January 5 this year on charges of bringing false allegations against him (the complainant).

Moving the bail petition, SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## DCs left out of by-poll duties

EC takes landmark decision to hold  
March 30 elections with own staff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the first time in its history, the Election Commission (EC) has appointed its own officials as returning and assistant returning officers to conduct by-election to seven constituencies on March 30.

Usually, the deputy commissioners (DC) are appointed ROs and upazila executive officers AROs for both general and by-elections.

This time the commission has picked its divisional deputy election commissioners and district election officers as ROs and district election officers as AROs.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain yesterday said they took the decision in light of the past experience. Political observers say most of the by-

elections under the previous political governments were mired in controversy because DCs and UEOs did not do enough to stave off political interference.

Brig Sakhawat said, "The commission wants the election officials to be directly accountable to it. This is why it has assigned its own officials to work as returning and assistant returning officers."

In future, more and more ROs and AROs will be appointed from among EC officials, he added.

The EC Secretariat on Wednesday published gazette notifications on the appointments.

Rangpur-3 and -6, Kurigram-2, Bogra-6 and -7, Bagerhat-1 and Kishoreganj-6 are the constituencies going to by-election. They fell vacant after President Zillur Rahman, Prime

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## Armed forces to be kept above controversies

PM also says National Defence  
Policy to be drafted

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government would keep the armed forces above all controversies and build up them as a patriotic, brave, efficient and invincible force.

Referring to her party's election manifesto, she said a National Defence Policy will be formulated to ensure security of the people and the country.

The premier explained her newly elected government's plans for building a new-look defence force and policy while addressing the certificate-awarding ceremony for 2008-09 sessions of the Defence Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC) at Mirpur Cantonment.

DSCSC Commandant Maj Gen Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan received her in the morning at the college ground.

Hasina noted that the armed forces are the symbol of country's independence and sovereignty, and a rethinking about upgrading their capabilities suiting newer security paradigms is an imperative.

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## Mojahid, Babar barred from going abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Immigration officials at Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday prevented Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid and former BNP state minister Lutfozzaman Babar from leaving the country.



Mojahid Babar

The Jamaat leader was supposed to fly to Saudi Arabia onboard a Qatar Airways flight at 8:30am while the former state minister was supposed to leave for Singapore at 1:40pm on a Thai Airways flight.

Sources said they were prevented from leaving the country on orders of the government. According to the sources, there is a list of over 60 people who are not allowed to leave the country.

Mojahid and Babar are accused in several cases and Babar has already been convicted in several of them.

Sources said Babar, along with one of his sisters and nephews, reached ZIA around 12:30pm. But immigration officials informed him of the prohibition on his departure. They left ZIA

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## Amar Ekushey tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation pays tribute to the language movement martyrs by placing wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar from midnight today.

President Zillur Rahman will be the first to pay tribute at the venue just after zero hour. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia will also place wreaths there.

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ROUTE MAP FOR SHAHEED  
MINAR ON PAGE 3

## Speaker mediates talks on JS seat plan row

Both chief whips tight-lipped about outcome;  
BNPPP meet called Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief whip-level talks mediated by Speaker Abdul Hamid to resolve the row over seating arrangements in the House yesterday ended with neither side agreeing to disclose the outcome to the media.

Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia convened a BNP Parliamentary Party (BNPPP)

meeting for Sunday after opposition Chief Whip Joyanal Abedin Faruk briefed her about the negotiations.

Earlier, both the chief whips declined to say anything about the meeting outcome. The speaker too would not disclose anything.

However, BNP MPs Mahub Uddin Khokon and AKM Hafizur Rahman claimed that Hamid

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### SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

#### The Daily Star 18th ANNIVERSARY THREE-PART SUPPLEMENT

##### Coming out in a series

On February 23, 24 and 25, 2009 The Daily Star will publish a 3-part 18th Anniversary Supplement. The central theme will be **Time to turn a corner** divided into three sub themes as follows:

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Information on Part 3 will be published on Saturday

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