

Launch Capsize

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of the launch was far beyond the capacity of the salvage vessels.

The launch again drowned as salvage vessels unchained it.

Hamza started the operation Sunday noon to rescue Coco-4, a double-decker launch that sank Thursday last around 11:00pm.

Later another salvage ship Rustam, which reached the spot in Lalmonohon of Bhola at about 11:00pm on Tuesday, joined the operation Wednesday morning and recovered six more bodies from inside the launch on the day.

However, after a thorough search, the officials of the salvage ships reported to the district administration.

When contacted Deputy Commissioner of Bhola Mesbahul Islam told The Daily Star that they had conducted the rescue operation only for missing passengers and launch lifting was not their job.

MISSING PERSONS

Babar Ali, UNO of Lalmonohon, however said two or three passengers still might be missing though the relatives could not say for sure whether they were boarding the launch.

But Students' Forum, a local student group that prepared a list of the missing, claimed that at least 75 passengers, who were

onboard, were still missing.

Engineer Abdul Halim, president of the forum, said they had prepared the list by setting up a camp on the riverbank where relatives of missing people recorded name of missing persons.

THREE ARRESTED

Meanwhile, Lalmonohon police on Wednesday arrested three persons in connection with the launch accident.

The arrestees are Jahangir, 22, Rafiq, 25 and Jalil, 24, all of Lalmonohon upazila.

Jahangir is a ghat labourer of Lalmonohon Launch ghat. Police sent him to court on the day while Rafiq and Jalil yesterday.

Further details of the arrest could not be known immediately.

COMPENSATION

Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers) Association yesterday decided to increase the amount of compensation for the capsized victims by 50 percent.

Earlier, the grant was of Tk 20,000 for a victim's family and Tk 30,000 for the family with more than one victim. It would be now Tk 30,000 and Tk 45,000 respectively.

The decision was taken yesterday at the board meeting of a trust fund of launch owners.

LAUNCH DISASTER Shipping minister slates owners' 'greed' for more money

A CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan said yesterday 'the greed of Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman' for money caused the death of so many people in the Lalmonohon launch disaster.

He said Coco-4 owners Tarique and Arafat were doing monopoly business from the inception of the launch route and barred other launches from plying the waterway.

"Apparently it seems the design of the launch was faulty as it met with three accidents earlier. If any design-fault is found, a separate case would be filed," he said to the journalists at Kawrakandi ghat at Shibchar in Madaripur on his way to Tungipara.

The shipping minister said the deputy commissioner of Bhola confirmed only three persons are still missing. "But there is no fault in rescue operation," he replied to a questioner.

He said 60 launches out of 82 plying the Mawa-Kawrakandi route underwent fitness survey during the present government. He said the ministry has taken a tough stance regarding the river vessels' survey.

On new rescue ships, the minister said new ships could not be procured right now.

5 killed in Kushtia road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A road accident in Kushtia killed five persons including women and children and injured six others yesterday evening.

Three of the dead were identified as Reazul Islam, 42, of Chechua, Nawab Ali, 40, of Baniapara, Rohela Khatun, 33, of Swastipur.

Identities of the deceased children could not be known immediately.

Police said the incident took place as a Pabna-bound passenger bus from Khulna collided head-on with a Nasiman Paribahan, a local engine-run vehicle, on Kushtia-Jhenidah highway in Chourhas area around 7:15pm.

Reazul, Nawab and two unknown children died on the spot. Reazul was the driver of the Nasiman.

Police rushed to the place and recovered the bodies.

The injured were admitted to Kushtia General Hospital where Rohela succumbed to her injuries.

Police mean while arrested driver of the passenger bus.

Traffic signal

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joint commissioner.

The DMP commissioner on Wednesday said, "We know that the electronic signal system will not totally relieve us of traffic congestion but if we can start a trend of obeying traffic rules, it will reduce the jam to some extent."

For now the DMP will demarcate lanes on VIP road, Mirpur road and Mohakhali Diversions to Tongi Bridge.

The fast lane of a road will be for cars, microbuses, jeeps and similar vehicles and the middle lane for minibuses, buses, covered vans, trucks and such automobiles while the slow lane for CNG-run auto rickshaws, pickup vans, motorbikes and such other modes of vehicles.

Plunderers

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forest area is virtually under the grip of dozen men.

The names of the gang members, which came up again and again during our stay in Kalenga include Nurullah, Swapn, Alauddin, Bellal, Jashim, Khalil and Shahadat.

According to Bangalee and Tripuri villagers, Kalenga and adjacent areas almost never receive any visitors during rainy season when road communication is virtually cut off.

A handful of visitors who come here during the dry season are mostly photographers, nature lovers, scientists and researchers.

"During rainy season, illegal logging is at its peak and these goons are extremely busy making money. With the press coming now they suddenly feel threatened and have become desperate," said a resident of Kalenga.

On March 6, 1999, a cultural programme organised by Udichi Shilpi Goshthi at Jessor Town Hall came under bomb attack that left ten people killed and over 100 injured.

The service holders who spent 10 years in service will be paid ranging Tk 22,500 to Tk 31,250, and those who served five years will be paid in between Tk 18,500 to Tk 29,700.

The salary structure ranging between Tk 15,000 to Tk 26,200

Intense pressure

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secretary general, might also remain in the post, as the possibility of replacing him has become slim, although a group of influential leaders are strongly lobbying against him.

The party is now finalising the list of councillors and delegates, and many leaders from Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka might be included by way of the chairperson's nomination quota.

According to the BNP constitution, the chairperson has the authority to nominate an additional 10 percent people as councillors.

The other councillors are the members of the standing committee, national executive committee and the parliamentary party, and the presidents and general secretaries of the executive committees of all levels.

The election commission's returning officer, Dr RA Gan, also a member of the standing committee yesterday said, "We have found Khaleda Zia's candidacy for the post of chairperson as valid, and she will be declared officially elected tomorrow, which is the last date for withdrawal of candidacy."

"But the official declaration will come through the national council on December 8," he added.

The party insiders said the likelihood of Delwar's continuation in the post of secretary general has almost been sealed by Khaleda Zia's and Tarique Rahman's contentment over his 'loyalty' and 'performance' in the last two years.

A group of party leaders are however trying to replace Delwar and lobbying for a former state minister, as they think a younger secretary general will be more efficient in touring the country for reorganisation of the party.

Khaleda appointed Delwar the secretary general on September 2, 2007 on the eve of her arrest by the immediate past caretaker emergency

Deals likely

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Commissioner in Dhaka Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty told journalists after his meeting with Foreign Secretary Md Mijarul Quayes at the foreign ministry yesterday.

Asked about the deals, the Indian envoy declined to elaborate.

Meanwhile, a foreign ministry official, preferring anonymity, told The Daily Star that there is a possibility of the two countries signing a deal on the trade of electricity. The Indian government in September agreed to sell Bangladesh at least 100 megawatts of electricity.

Bangladesh and India need to sign agreements on purchase of power from India as the two countries must construct a common distribution line between them, the official said.

The foreign ministry official said the other deal would be on improving Bangladesh's railway and roads with Indian funding.

The previously agreed three deals are ready and

expected to be signed during Hasina's visit.

Sheikh Hasina will leave for New Delhi on December 18 on a three-day visit. This will be her first trip to India since she assumed office for the second time in January this year.

The Bangladeshi premier will meet top Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and is likely to visit the information technology hubs Bangalore and Hyderabad.

She will also make a personal trip to Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan and she will travel to Kolkata to pay a courtesy call on veteran leader Jyoti Basu who was chief minister of West Bengal till 2000 from 1977.

Hasina is expected to meet Indian National Congress leader Siddhartha Shankar Roy, who was chief minister of West Bengal during the Liberation War.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Indian water resources ministry arrived here in Dhaka to discuss river water sharing issues between the two countries.

Gazette on Information

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information, and is now framing a set of rules for its effective functioning, he said.

The minister was talking to journalists following a meeting with a four-member delegation of International Press Institute (IPI) at his office.

The delegation included IPI director David Dodge, press and communications manager Anthony Mills, president of Norwegian Institute of Journalism Trine Ostbygen and IPI board member and chairperson of the IPI Bangladesh National Committee Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul.

The three-member Information Commission, formed on July 1 this year, is facing difficulties in enforcing the RTI Act since it is yet to have a permanent office, required manpower and logistics.

The minister regretted incidents of long delay in labour court in disposing of cases filed by journalists seeking their dues following resignation or termination of jobs.

The minister was in his other house in the port city during the raid.

"We are raiding the houses of those allegedly involved in the plundering of the forest," he said.

Shafique said he informed the IPI delegation that the mass media in Bangladesh is enjoying full freedom, and journalists are easily getting information from the government, semi-government and statutory organisations.

As these organisations are bound to provide information as per provisions of the RTI Act, journalists can make authentic reports, he said.

The law minister said the government will take proper

SAFF football

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Bhutan will take on Bhutan in the day's second match at 7:30pm after the first match between Sri Lanka and Pakistan kicks off the proceedings at 4:00pm. State-owned Bangladesh Television will telecast all matches of the tournament live from the venue.

Younger leaders who were close to Tarique during BNP's last stint in power, are now trying to ensure his supremacy in the upcoming national council, the insiders said.

A number of senior leaders are also backing the pro-Tarique group as they think Delwar's control within the party will be curbed if Tarique is included in the central executive committee.

They already proposed to party high-ups creation of a post of co-chairperson or senior vice-president for Tarique, so he gets the opportunity to organise the party soon after his return from abroad.

BNP lawmaker Rehana Akther Ranu told The Daily Star last night that both the party and the country will be emboldened under the leadership of Tarique Rahman in the future, and that is why they want to see him in the party leadership.

Meanwhile, all sub-committees formed for the national council are busy putting the final touches on their preparations for the council.

The management sub-committee led by Mirza Abbas is scheduled to meet today in Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, the venue for the council.

Mirza Abbas told reporters yesterday that 150 seats will be reserved for guests from different political parties, including one for ruling Awami League President Sheikh Hasina.

The foreign affairs sub-committee led by Shafiq Rehman will also meet today to finalise the list of invited foreign guests, while the cultural affairs sub-committee visited the council venue yesterday for their programme planning.

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