

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 Lalmoheon 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 Lalmoheon, 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

on board, 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, Lalmoheon police on Wednesday arrested three persons in connection with the launch accident.

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

Jahangir is a ghat labourer of Lalmoheon 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 Bhola 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 Tungpara.

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.

Rezaul, Nawab and two unknown children died on the spot. Rezaul 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 meanwhile 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 Division to Tongi Bridge.

The fast lane of a road will be for cars, minibuses, 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 a dozen men.

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

According to Bangalee and Tripri 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.

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 like 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 Gani, 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 unofficially 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

regime, after expelling former secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan from the organisation for breach of discipline.

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 Akhter 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.

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 Bangladesh 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 Ostlyngen 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.

Besides, the government has not yet framed rules necessary for implementation of the act.

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

action if any journalist is tortured while performing professional duties.

Replying to a question on the latest position of cases concerning killing of journalists including Manik Saha and Goutam Das, Shafique said police are investigating the cases, and trials will be held in accordance with law.

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.

Scrap trader

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Chowdhury, joint convener of BNP north Chittagong district unit, at Sitakunda the same night.

But Aslam 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. The information we have received so far is being verified," said Sub-Inspector Md Shawkat Hossain, investigation officer in the case.

"The hunt for the people responsible for the destruction of the forest is on," he added.

The three-member probe committee headed by Additional DIG Maqbul Hossain Bhuiyan had visited the denuded forestland in Sonaichhari, Shawkat said.

SAFF football

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Hosts Bangladesh will take on Bhutan in the day's second match at 7:00pm 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.

Defending champions Maldives, three-time champions India, former champions Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan will fight it out for the coveted regional crown.

Finance Minister AMA Mubith will declare the eight-nation football carnival open as chief guest while State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarker along with BFF high-ups will be present.

There will be a brief opening ceremony before the Bangladesh-Bhutan match with some 5000 balloons to be released and later the chief guest will be introduced to the players.

The local organising committee have already taken all necessary steps to make the tournament a success. To bring enthusiasm, the organising committee have already launched an extensive PR campaign by hanging posters, displaying festoons and releasing leaflets in both Dhaka and Narayanganj. They also launched promotional events in radio as well as cinema halls to bring the crowd to the Big Bowl.

Tickets for the matches have been priced at Tk 30 for the eastern gallery, Tk50 for the western gallery and Tk 80 for gate-2, Tk 100 for gates 10 & 11, Tk 150 for gate-3 and Tk 200 for gate-1. Tickets will be on sale at the BFF House and the venue from 11 am today.

The 2008 SAFF Championship was co-hosted by Sri Lanka and Maldives.

Dhaka to seek

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"We shall demand Tk 70,000 crore including Tk 38,000 crore for dredging the rivers," committee Chief Abdul Momin Talukder told a press briefing after the meeting.

He said 19 percent of the country's lands would go under water because of climate change.

Members of the parliamentary body will attend the conference in Copenhagen of Denmark from December 7 to 18.

They also discussed the plundering of forest at Sitakunda in Chittagong.

The committee chief said when the state minister for environment and forest came to know about felling of trees there, he asked the police to stop it.

But the law enforcers did not take any action, he said.

"An enquiry is underway and actions will be taken against the people responsible," the committee chief added.

Ulfa chief

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rebel leaders -- chairman of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) Ranjan Daimary and chairman of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) Biswamohan Debbarma -- have also been held elsewhere in Bangladesh.

India's home ministry has not confirmed the reports of the arrests in Bangladesh.

Quoting Indian government sources, the CNN-IBN website says the Centre is considering giving safe passage to Rajkhowa to facilitate the peace talks.

It adds Ulfa chairman Rajkhowa and its publicity secretary Apurba Borua were flown into New Delhi in a special flight of the Border Security Force, while Rajkhowa's wife and two sons have also been reportedly kept under house arrest in Uttara in Dhaka.

Forty-two bank accounts held by Rajkhowa in a Dhaka bank were frozen in March. The accounts held deposits worth Rs 3,900 crore, most of which was extortion money.

Sources say Rajkhowa held the accounts under the name of Arbinda Ray and the accounts were frozen two months after Sheikh Hasina came to power in Bangladesh.

Hasina government is also putting pressure on him for talks with India.

Jailer lands

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Khagrachhari district jail, Rubel bent Sultan up without any provocation that had Sultan's leg broken in jail on November 23, 2007.

The attack on Sultan was illegal, he added.

Rubel is now jailer of Faridpur district jail. He is also accused in two other cases filed with the Khagrachhari District Judge Court and Chief Judicial Magistrate Court.

Pak forces kill

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remote-controlled bomb blast," Karim Khan, senior police official in Peshawar, told AFP.

On Wednesday two naval policemen were killed when a suicide bomber targeted a navy compound in Islamabad, while a day earlier a provincial lawmaker died in a similar attack in the one-time tourist haven of Swat valley.

Pakistani troops poured into Swat and neighbouring districts in April to drive out Taliban militants who were advancing towards Islamabad, and sporadic clashes continue, despite the military's claims of success in the valley.

Late Wednesday in Seigram village, about 25 kilometres (15 miles) north-west of Swat's main city Mingora, security forces seeking a local insurgent commander stormed a Taliban hideout.

"An exchange of fire took place resulting in the deaths of 10 miscreants and injuries to one soldier," the army-run Swat media centre said in a statement, adding that the militant commander was among those killed.

Two other militants were killed in a shoot-out with security forces in Swat's Matta town on Thursday morning, the centre added.

Swat slipped out of government control in July 2007 after radical cleric Maulana Fazlullah mounted a violent campaign in which his followers beheaded opponents, burnt schools and fought to enforce Islamic Sharia law.

Pakistan's military is now engaged in a fierce offensive in the northwest tribal belt along the Afghan border, where the core Taliban leadership and al-Qaeda-linked

Delwar slates

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launch capsized and investigation into the incident is our demand too,"

The government filed the case on Wednesday against Tarique, Arafat and Giasuddin Al Mamun of Messrs Rahman Shippers Bangladesh Ltd that owns the launch Coco-4.

It sank in the river Tetulia with more than two thousand passengers on November 27 - just a day before the Eid. At least 84 people died in the incident.

3 Somali ministers

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Several ministers from the UN-backed government were attending the ceremony when the explosion went off. Most of the victims were students.

A hotel security official said the suicide bomber was probably among the guests. The head of an NGO operating in Mogadishu said the bomber was dressed as a woman.

Higher Education Minister Ibrahim Hassan Addow and Health Minister Qamar Aden were killed on the spot and Education Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Waayel died shortly after the blast, a senior government official said.

Sports Minister Suleyman Olad Roble was among the injured, the official added.

Two journalists, one from Shabele Radio and another from Al Arabiya television, and a doctor were also killed, a source at the hotel said.

AFP photographer Mohamed Dahir sustained slight injuries.

"We were waiting outside the conference room when there was a huge explosion. I found myself on the ground in the middle of the smoke and screaming," said Dahir.

"I went to get my camera, and that's when I saw the bodies of the three ministers."

New EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton condemned the bombing and promised to seek a coordinated international response to Somalia's woes.

"I condemn in the strongest terms possible this cowardly attack against civilians including students, doctors and journalists," Ashton said in a statement.

In Kampala, the acting head of AMISOM, the African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia, Wafu Wamunyini, said the attack "was intended to intimidate and blackmail the TFG. We condemn this incident in the strongest terms."

Thousands have been killed in Mogadishu in recent years as Islamists battle for control of the capital.

The Somali insurgents launched a fresh offensive against the transitional government of President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed on May 7 and clashes since then have left

militants are holed up in the rugged mountain terrain.

In Bajaur tribal district early Thursday, militants attacked security checkpoints on the outskirts of the main town of Khar.

"It was an organised attack. Troops effectively repulsed it, and five militants were killed in the retaliatory fire," said Fazal Rabbi, deputy commander of the local tribal police force.

Pakistan sent 30,000 troops backed by helicopter gunships and fighter jets into South Waziristan on October 17, and offensives are also underway in the other tribal regions that string the Afghan border.

Security has drastically deteriorated in Pakistan since Islamabad joined the US-led "war on terror" and hundreds of Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants fled into the tribal belt after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

More than 2,570 people have been killed in suicide blasts and attacks in Pakistan since July 2007.

Govt schools

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Government Bigyan College High School, Dhanmondi Government Girls High School and Dhanmondi Kamrunessa Government Girls High School.

The schools under group-C are Dhanmondi Government Boys High School, Armanitola Government High School, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Government Girls High School, Tikatuli Kamrunessa Government Girls High School, Tejgaon Government Girls High School, Dhaka Collegiate School, Ganobhaban Government High School and Tejgaon Government High School and they will hold admission test on December 27.

Separate committees have been formed ahead of the admission tests. A central committee headed by DSHE Director General Prof Nomanur-Rashid is monitoring the entire process, said sources. Deputy commissioners are the chiefs of district level committees.

Children above seven will not be allowed to get admission in class one in any of the government schools.

Students competing for admission have to take a written test of 100 marks on Bangla, English and mathematics.

Huji founder

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CID's Additional Superintendent of Police Abdul Kahar Akand, who is the investigation officer of the case, told The Daily Star that of the accused Salam gave the first confessional statement.

CID and court sources said Salam was produced at the court around 2:00pm and Magistrate Moazzem Hossain recorded his statement for six hours. Salam was arrested on November 2 for suspected links with the August 21 incident.

According to sources, the Huji founder narrated the roles of a few top political leaders and influential administrative officials in the attempt to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was the opposition leader in parliament at that time when the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance was in power.

In his statement, Salam admitted that he was present at a meeting held at the Dhanmondi residence of detained former BNP deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu.

Pintu's fugitive brother and LeT leader Maulana Tajuddin, detained former BNP state minister Lutfozzaman Babar, detained Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan and other influential persons were also present at the meeting, Salam said.

He said he returned to Bangladesh after the end of Afghan war against erstwhile Soviet Union and formed Huji along with other veterans of the war.

He confessed to having trained many youths, mainly madrasa students, in operating firearms and bombs. Apart from Bangladeshis, most of their recruits came from the Pakistan-administered Kashmir, he said.

They had also mobilised funds, arms and ammunition

Govt issues gazette

FROM PAGE 1
implemented from July next year.

For the first time, the new pay scale has separate salary structures for the officials of BDR, police, bank, financial institutions, judicial service and autonomous bodies.

As per the gazette notification for the judicial service, salary for the judicial service holders has been fixed maximum Tk 29,000 and minimum Tk 11,000.

The government officials' salary will be increased by at least Tk 2,000. If anyone's salary does not match with the minimum rise, their salary will be adjusted in line with the increased salary structure.

Earlier, the government approved the seventh national pay scale on November 11.

As per the gazette, the highest salary will be paid to those who are in service for 20 years. The salary range of Tk 33,500 to Tk 39,500 will be paid to those who are working for 17 years.

The public servants who are serving for 14 years will be eligible for Tk 29,000 to Tk 35,600 salary range, while those who are in service for 12 years will get Tk 25,750 to Tk 33,750.

The service holders who spent 10 years in service will be paid ranging Tk 22,250 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

has been fixed for those who spent four years in service.