

BAD WEATHER AND OTHER REASONS

Salvage of MT Meherjan finally postponed

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Barisal

Authorities yesterday suspended the operation to salvage oil tanker MT Meherjan that capsized with about 700 tonnes of fuel following a collision with cargo vessel MV Fazlul Huq-3 at Kaliganj-Gobindapur point of the Meghna River on July 25 night.

"We have postponed the salvage activities till improvement of the overall weather condition including river current, and removal of other obstacles," said AKM Arif Uddin, deputy secretary (Administration) of BIWTA, also coordinator of the salvage operation titled 'Operation Meher'.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) salvage vessels Hamza and Rustam, navy ship BNS Soikat and all other vessels and the teams engaged in salvage operation left the spot this evening," he said yesterday.

Earlier on Thursday, the authorities announced a 72-hour 'Operation Meher' following a joint meeting of the officials of navy, coast-guard, and BIWTA, and representatives of the oil tanker and others concerned on BIWTA ship Shandhani.

But repeated failure in starting the rescue attempt has led to postponement of a



PHOTO: STAR

Salvage ships, sent to rescue sunken oil tanker MT Meherjan from a depth of 90 feet in the Meghna River, left the spot yesterday evening as Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority suspended the operation until the overall weather condition improves.

the operation, Arif Uddin said, adding that members of the salvage team termed several factors including inclement weather, spread of huge fishing nets, heavy siltation on the sunken tanker and lack of adequate logistics as hindrance to the operation.

BIWTA Deputy Director Alamgir Kabir, also the officer in charge of Barisal port, said both capsized oil tanker MT Meherjan and detained cargo vessel MV Fazlul Huq-3 were plying without permission to navigate at night.

Bellal Hossain, engineer

of Polar Shipping Company, owner of capsized MT Meherjan, said, "So far only the fuel oil from the tanker's engine has spilled over. Eleven days into the sinking of the tanker, its fuel containers are still safe. But I do not know how long they will sustain the water pressure under 85-90 feet, amid the strong current."

"Suspension of the salvage operation may lead to an environmental disaster in a vast area as the possibility of massive oil spill is increasing in the prevailing situation. Besides, huge siltation may create obstacle on the

way of safe navigation on the busy route," said advocate Suvash Chandra Biprobodanti, coordinator of Barisal Environmental Network.

The sinking of MT Meherjan and failure to rescue it in eleven days show lack of safety preparedness for carrying hazardous materials on river routes in the country and lack of awareness among vessel owners and authorities about related rules, said Suvash Chandra, also former coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association.

Jubo League men assault 2 newsmen

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Patuakhali

Jubo League men assaulted two journalists, who were covering a demonstration by locals in Hetalia Badghat area under Patuakhali Sadar upazila, yesterday morning.

Monir Hossain Badal, Patuakhali correspondent of Somoy TV, and Mostafizur Rahman, local correspondent of Dakkhinanchal, a Bangla daily published from Barisal, went to the area where local people took out a procession at around 11:00am, protesting filling up of their land with sand near Hetalia Canal by a contractor for Abason (housing) Project for poor people.

At one stage, the protesters started marching towards the deputy commissioner's office, but police intercepted them.

When Badal and Mostafizur were taking photos, Jubo League men led Patuakhali town Jubo League General Secretary Monir Khan attacked the journalists, beat them up and damaged a camera. Locals rescued the journo and took them to a safer place.

Refuting the allegation, Jubo League leader Monir Khan said an incident occurred in Hetalia Badghat area as local were obstructing the contractor and his workers from filling up the land near Hetalia Canal for Abason Project. Jubo League men were not involved in the incident, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Around two dozens of houses were vandalised or damaged by fire as two groups of villagers locked in a series of clashes over building a mosque on a disputed land in Chirribandar upazila of Dinajpur yesterday.



50 hurt in Dinajpur clashes, 25 houses damaged

110 injured in three other districts

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least 160 people were injured in clashes in four districts yesterday and the day before.

More than 50 people were injured in sporadic clashes in Chirribandar upazila of Dinajpur yesterday, over building a mosque on a disputed land.

During the clashes, rival gangs vandalised and torched several houses and looted a few others at Rajahat village, law enforcers and villagers said.

According to the villagers, there had been a long-standing dispute between two local communities in the area over building a mosque near another religious establishment in Balaihat area of the upazila.

Due to a tense situation over the issue, the local administration enforced Section 144 in the area from 6:00am yesterday.

However, at around 9:30am, clashes ensued taking advantage of lax restriction.

Meanwhile, the district administration prepared a list of 35 victims and 25 houses vandalised or damaged by arson.

Local administration deployed BGB and police to avert further clashes.

A temporary police camp has also been set up

near the disputed land while construction of the mosque remained suspended, said Moinul Islam, Police Superintendent of Dinajpur.

In Netrapona, at least 40 people were injured, four of them bullet-hurt, in a clash between a fish trader of Itna upazila in Kishoreganj district and fisherman of Khaliajuri upazila in the district yesterday morning over taking control of Gugribad waterbody in Khaliajuri upazila, reports our correspondent.

Police said, the clash took place between the people of Mamun Chowdhury, a fish trader and UP chairman of Badla UP in Itna upazila and fishermen of Khaliajuri upazila.

Mamun and his men attacked the fishermen with guns, sharp and lethal weapons. The fisherman retaliated, leaving at least 40 people from both groups injured.

In Jhenidah, at least 20 people were injured in a clash between the people of two UP members at Chandpur village under Shaikupa upazila yesterday.

Ten of the injured were admitted to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital, reports our correspondent.

According to Phulhari UP chairman Feroj Ahmed, acting UP member Sahidul Islam and former UP member Abul Hossain locked in an altercation in the morning over a trivial matter and started to beat up the loyalists of each other, triggering the clash.

In Narail, at least 50 people were injured in a fierce clash between two rival groups at Kanduri village under Kolabaria union in Kalia upazila on Friday noon, reports our correspondent.

During the clash, at least seven houses were ransacked and looted.

Police and locals said, there was a long-standing conflict between Kolabaria union parishad member Elius Mollah and Jalal Sheikh of Kanduri village.

On Friday morning, a cow owned by Jalal Sheikh damaged a paddy field of Mukter Mollah, a supporter of Elius Mollah, triggering an altercation.

Within minutes, two rival groups equipped with lethal weapons attacked each other, leaving at least 50 from both sides injured. The clashing groups also damaged seven houses.

SNIPPETS

Accused snatched from police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Criminals attacked Detective Branch (DB) of police and snatched a handcuffed accused at Chandropur village in Kaliganj upazila on Friday night. Injured Zohurul Islam and Sekendar Ali, sub-inspector and constable of DB, were admitted to the upazila health complex. Amiruzzaman, officer in-charge of Kaliganj police station, said the DB men arrested Shoriful Islam alias Shofu, 40, son of late Jobbar Ali of the village, on charge of drug peddling at around 9:00pm. Being informed, about 15 to 16 accomplices of the arrestee attacked the law enforcers in the area and snatched him, the OC said.

Bus strike called off

UNB, Panchagarh

Bus operators resumed services on Panchagarh-Atwari-Thakurgaon route yesterday, after nearly six days of suspension. Leaders of District Bus-Minibus Owners Association decided to resume the services following an understanding at a meeting with students and their guardians on Friday night. Local sources said students of Mirza Golam Hafiz Degree College damaged three buses as workers of a local bus beat up four students of the college on July 29. The association stopped bus services on Panchagarh-Atwari-Thakurgaon route the same day demanding compensation to the affected bus owners.

15 shops gutted in Noakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali:

Fire gutted at least 15 shops at Horonbibi Bazaar under Begumganj upazila yesterday morning. Fire service men and locals said, the fire originated from an electric short circuit at a grocery shop. Within moments, the fire engulfed the adjacent shops and a warehouse. Mozammel Hossain, president of Horonbibi bazaar traders association said, the fire damaged goods worth TK. 30 lakhs.

Kidnapped teacher back home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A kidnapped schoolteacher of Madhyaganar in Sunamganj district was rescued after three days, police said. Officer in-charge of Madhyaganar police station Mizanul Haque quoted the victim as saying that he was picked up from his Noddapara house in the early hours of Tuesday. As police launched several raids at places, the gang left Chandan Sarker in front of the



PHOTO: STAR

Police in Jhikargachha, Jessore, yesterday recovered a baby crocodile and arrested a poacher. The arrestee brought the crocodile from Sundarbans for selling in Dhaka at high rate. Humayun Kabir, officer-in-charge of Jhikargachha Police Station, said police led by ASI Morshed Alam raided a Dhaka-bound bus, recovered the baby crocodile and arrested the poacher.



PHOTO: STAR

Logs of the roadside trees, felled by a member of Ronogopaldi Union Parishad (UP) in Dashmina upazila of Patuakhali district, are kept at his sawmill in the area, inset, one of the felled trees still lies on the road.

UP member fells roadside trees

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Patuakhali

A union parishad member felled at least 10 roadside trees worth Tk one lakh in Dashmina upazila last week.

Locals alleged that Abdur Rahman Rob, member of Ronogopaldi union, along with his men cut down at least 10 trees, including rain tree, Mahogany and Shishu, from both sides of road in the eastern side of Jouta Bazar and took the trees to his sawmill.

But nobody dared to protest the incident as the UP member is a very influential person in the area, they said.

Earlier, Rob felled at least 25 more trees in the area. A few of them were sold while the rest used

during construction of his business establishments at the bazar.

Despite repeated complaints, the authorities turned a blind eye to the matter, said the locals.

Contacted, the UP member said he felled the trees to build a mosque in the bazar.

However, he denied the allegation of selling the trees.

Abdus Salam, bit officer of forest department, said they have already seized ten trees from the sawmill.

Baufal upazila forest officer Awlad Hossain said they did not get any complaint in this regard and refuted the charges of a 'link' between forest men and Rob.

We are taking preparation to file a case against the UP member, he said.

Three kids drown in Chandpur

UNB, Chandpur

Three children, two of them cousins, drowned in ponds in separate incidents in Hajiganj upazila of the district on Friday afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Sakir Ahmed, 4, son of Nasiruddin Bhuiyan; his cousin Roja Moni, 2, daughter of Harun-or-Rashid of Nishintapur village; and Nipa Akhter, 2, daughter of Delwar Hossain of Shurshoi village.

Locals said Roja Moni suddenly fell in a pond adjacent to their house while playing with Sakir in the afternoon.

Sakir also drowned as he tried to save his cousin. Later, the family members recovered the bodies of the two minor children from the pond at about 6:30 pm.

Similarly, Nipa slipped into the pond and drowned at about 3:30 pm.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Low-lying neighbourhoods of Kaukhali upazila in Pirojpur district have gone under water as higher than usual tidal surge flooded the area during the full moon.