

Philippine ferry sinks

Two killed, dozens rescued

AFP, Manila

Fishermen and rescue workers hauled dozens of people out of the sea after a ferry sank in the central Philippines yesterday, but at least two passengers drowned, authorities said.

In the latest disaster to hit the nation's notoriously dangerous sea transport industry, the ferry mysteriously sank in calm weather before dawn about two kilometres (1.2 miles) from Burias island.

Fishermen on small outrigger motorboats were among the first to arrive on the scene and saved many lives, said local coastguard deputy chief Bayani Belisario.

"They (the passengers) were floating in their life jackets and the rescuers picked them out of the water," Belisario told AFP.

He said several people from the sunken ship were also able to make the long swim to the shores of Burias on their own.

A navy plane and a coast-guard ship, diverted from taking part in maritime exercises in Indonesia, joined the search and 55 people were rescued throughout the morning, according to the authorities.

But Belisario said the bodies of two women were recovered from the water.

Coast guard volunteer Amadeo Tan told ABS-CBN television that his wife, who was on the ship, called him by her mobile phone to say the boat had sank.

"She was already floating in the water. I did not think twice and we rushed to the site," said Tan, a resident of Masbate island, the ferry's destination.

Tan said his group rescued dozens including his wife, who was unhurt but left traumatised by the incident.

The ferry's manifest listed 35 passengers and 22 crew aboard but local civil defence chief Raffy Alejandro said there could be as many as seven people still missing.

Seven drivers and assistants who brought two buses and a truck aboard the roll-on, roll-off ferry may not have been listed because they travelled for free, Alejandro told AFP.

India

FROM PAGE 16

which the mentioned four personnel were a part of, had tried to stop them, but it was attacked and beaten up with sticks by the alleged smugglers. The troops had then opened fire, killing two Bangladesh citizens and injuring another, the BSF sources claimed.

However, the four BSF personnel were found not to have reported the incident correctly to their superiors, after which they were placed under suspension for "procedural lapses".

BSF officials, however, claimed that the encounter and firing had been genuine and carried out following all proper procedures, but the act of not providing correct details and sequence of the incident proved costly for the four men and an enquiry was underway.

The BSF Act has specific clauses for those who do not carry out their duties properly and hence they have been booked under those charges and not on the clauses of fake encounter, they said.

The suspended officials were also badly injured in the incident, and are now under medical care, the BSF sources added.

BSF officials said the four officials who were suspended belonged to the 40th Battalion of the BSF deployed at Andrail border outpost, opposite to Bangladesh's Putkhali border outpost manned by Border Guard Bangladesh.

K Rouge victims sue Cambodia opposition member

AFP, Phnom Penh

Four survivors of a notorious Khmer Rouge torture prison yesterday took a key Cambodian opposition member to court for allegedly saying the jail was a Vietnamese fabrication, the victims' lawyer said.

Kem Sokha, deputy head of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), will face a civil law claim of public defamation after he purportedly said Tuol Sleng prison was staged by the Vietnamese, who ousted the Khmer Rouge in 1979.

Thousands of men, women and children were detained at Tuol Sleng -- also known as S-21 -- and tortured into denouncing themselves and others as foreign spies.

"The lawsuit is about public defamation over his comment about Tuol Sleng," lawyer Kouy Thunna told AFP.

If found guilty, Kem Sokha could be fined up to \$2,500, the lawyer added.

The CNRP swiftly denounced the move as the latest in a series of politically motivated smears aimed at the opposition party ahead of July's general election.

"All things have been orchestrated by the ruling party," CNRP spokesman Yim Sovann said.

But Chum Mey, a prominent survivor of the prison regime, said the quartet decided to sue because Kem Sokha refused to apologise for the purported remarks.

"We are demanding \$1,000 from him in compensation in order to cover a religious ceremony for the dead so their souls will be calm," he told AFP.

About 10,000 Cambodians protested in the capital on Sunday against Kem Sokha.

The CNRP has said the

remarks -- posted on a government website last month -- were doctored to cause "political trouble" before the July 28 elections, when Prime Minister Hun Sen will seek to extend his near three decade-grip on power.

Kem Sokha has accused Hun Sen's ruling party of inciting the protests against him -- a claim denied by Cambodia's strongman leader -- and complained that his political meetings this week were disrupted by hundreds of protesters.

Cambodia's parliament last week passed a law banning the denial of atrocities committed by the hardline communist regime -- a move the opposition says targets them before elections.

Hun Sen has led the country since 1985 and his government is regularly accused of suppressing political freedoms and mistreating activists.

WHO says MERS virus death toll hits 33

AFP, Geneva

The global death toll from the SARS-like virus MERS has risen to 33, after two new fatalities in Saudi Arabia, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday.

Spokeswoman Fadela Chaib said the Saudi health ministry had informed the UN agency of three new laboratory-confirmed cases, one of them fatal, and the death of a patient already diagnosed with the disease.

"Globally, from September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a total of 58 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including 33 deaths," Chaib told reporters.

Until last month, the disease was known simply as novel coronavirus, before being renamed Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

Coronavirus, or MERS-CoV, as cases initiated in that region.

There have now been 44 confirmed cases in Saudi Arabia, 28 of them fatal, according to WHO figures.

WHO logs cases by country of infection, rather than of death, and its Saudi toll includes one individual who died in Britain.

One person has died in France after being infected in Dubai, and a patient died in Munich, Germany who was transferred there after first being treated in Abu Dhabi.

There have also been two cases in Jordan, both of them fatal. Qatar has seen two, with those patients treated in Britain and Germany.

Two patients caught the disease in Britain from a person who had been to the Middle East, one of whom died.

Khaleque's name

FROM PAGE 1

Khaleque, the ruling Awami League-led alliance backed candidate seeking re-election, and it was followed by four questions, two of which was on the former mayor of Khulna City Corporation.

The paragraph read: "Elected mayor of Khulna municipality Mr Talukder Abdul Khaleque punished his elder son Abdul Halim accordingly following investigation into serious allegations. Khaleque received accolade from people for his action. Criminal activities reduced and peace was restored in society."

The other question was: What virtue of Hazrat Omar was reflected in mayor Abdul Khaleque.

The two questions carried seven out of 10 marks.

Khaleque's rival in the electoral race Moniruzzaman Moni, who is backed by the BNP-led 18-party opposition alliance, disclosed the matter before the media at a press conference yesterday. He alleged violation of electoral code of conduct.

However, Khaleque at another press conference said he knew nothing about the question paper. The school managing committee, headmaster and teachers would know better, he said.

Khaleque is childless. Interestingly, Halima Islam, who has ruling Awami League's backing in her bid to become elected as a councillor in

Ward-8, is the chief of the managing committee of Pioneer Secondary Girls School.

Headmistress Jafroza Khanam of the school told The Daily Star, "We did not prepare the question paper. We bought it from Printek Press."

Terming it a mistake, she said, "As most of our teachers were busy with electoral training ahead of the city corporation polls, we could not go through the question paper. The same question paper was used in some other schools as well."

Jafroza said they would take necessary action regarding the matter after the city corporation polls today.

Nuruzzaman Monu owner of Printek Press could not be contacted for comments last night.

Obama nears final decision

FROM PAGE 16

But after the Tazreen factory fire in November that killed 112 people and the Rana Plaza building collapse in April that killed 1,129 more, it seems likely that Obama will eliminate or reduce the trade benefits, Celeste Drake, the AFL-CIO's lead on trade issues, told Reuters this week.

The past year in Bangladesh has been so horrendous that unless the United States acts the labour provisions of the GSP programme will be seen as meaningless, she said.

The GSP programme is aimed at helping create jobs in poor countries by waiving US duties on thousands of goods as long as the countries meet certain eligibility requirements.

Bangladesh has been in the programmesinceit began in 1976. But its main export, clothing, is not eligible for GSP tariff cuts, in deference to the US textile and apparel industry, which employed some 2.4 million workers four decades ago compared to less than 3,000,000 now.

Last year, the GSP programme spared

Bangladesh about \$2 million in duties on \$35 million worth of tents, golf equipment, plates and other items it exported to the United States, said Ed Gresser, a trade analyst with the GlobalWorks Foundation.

But Bangladesh paid about \$732 million in duties on \$4.9 billion worth of clothing to the United States. That is almost twice as much as the \$383 million in US tariffs collected on \$41 billion worth of French goods in 2012, Gresser said.

In the past, some lawmakers have proposed changing the GSP programme to provide duty-free benefits for clothing from Bangladesh and Cambodia, but US textile manufacturers lobbied to prevent action on the legislation.

At least 13 countries have lost some or all of their GSP benefits since workers rights protections were added to the eligibility criteria in the 1980s. Most have been reinstated after making progress on the concerns.

While Bangladeshi clothing manufacturers would not be directly affected by a deci-

sion to suspend the GSP programme, Drake said she expected other Bangladeshi companies hit with increased duties to join the international community in lobbying the government for labour reforms.

"It's a small stick, which is perhaps right, given that it is a developing country. Nobody wants to do something that would be an earthquake to their economy," Drake said.

Sanchita Saxena, associate director of the Center for South Asia Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, said revoking Bangladesh's GSP benefits would not help workers in Bangladesh's garment industry.

"If the US wants to help improve conditions, international brands and international NGOs can help in building capacity to monitor thousands of factories that need monitoring and help to enforce some of the laws that are in the books," she said.

US retailers should also sign an agreement embraced by European retailers to improve safety conditions in Bangladesh's garment industry, Saxena said.

Myanmar lifts aid block for Kachin rebel territory: UN

AFP, Yangon

The United Nations yesterday said that it had been allowed by the Myanmar government to deliver emergency aid to displaced people in rebel-held territory in the northern state of Kachin for the first time in nearly a year.

A 10-truck UN-led convoy left on Wednesday with food and other essential items for about 5,000 of the tens of thousands of people displaced by two years of violence in the far north of the former military-ruled country.

The development came after the government and the rebels last month reached a preliminary ceasefire agreement in a bid to end a conflict that has forced about 100,000 people to flee their homes.

Councillor

FROM PAGE 1

money in South Surma area of Sylhet city, said SM Rokun Uddin, additional commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police.

Police also arrested Jamal Ahmed, an associate of Zuber Khan, a pro-ruling party councillor candidate from ward-5, with Tk 15,400 when Zuber was allegedly distributing money in Bara Bazar of Monipuri Para around 8:30pm.

Locals had caught Jamal and handed him over to police.

Zuber, however, managed to flee the scene in an ambulance.

Meanwhile, Rapid Action Battalion arrested one Jamal, an alleged aide to pro-BNP councillor candidate Humayun Kabir from ward-24, with Tk 30,000 at Teroratan near Shahjalal Uposohor area of the city, said Akhter Hossain officer-in-charge of Shah Poran Police Station.

Anti-terror

FROM PAGE 1

A provision of the amended law says it will allow the court to accept videos, photos and audio clips from social media on the Internet as evidence, which noted jurist Shahdeen Malik termed a blatant violation of any individual's fundamental right to privacy.

Besides, this provision supersedes the existing Evidence Act that does not allow such materials as evidence in a court of law, the expert said.

According to the law, police or law enforcers have been given arbitrary power as they will not need prior permission of the court to eavesdrop on individuals or entities using the Internet.

He said no law, intended to enhance security of the people, could curtail their basic human and fundamental rights.

Executive Director Sultana Kamal of Ain O Salish Kendra said any person could be a victim of email account hacking.

"Therefore anyone can be victimised and harassed by giving false information through hacking his or her emails intentionally," she told The Daily Star.

According to a provision of the law, the central bank is given sweeping power to seize suspicious accounts without court orders, which, according to experts, is in itself against the principle of natural justice.

Former election commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Sakhawat Husein said there were chances of the law being misused. He said the power given to law enforcers could cause harassment of innocent people.

Police could have this power but the power should be authorised by judicial officer. Otherwise, cavalier attitude would violate people's fundamental and basic rights, he said.

Mizanur Rahman Khan, a journalist working with legal issues, said the amended law has the provision for death penalty in case an accused harms or tries to harm a foreign nation but the penalty is life imprisonment in case of harming or trying to harm Bangladesh.

Iran votes for new president

FROM PAGE 16

World powers in talks with Iran over its nuclear programme are looking for any signs of a recalibration of its negotiating stance after eight years of intransigence under Ahmadinejad.

Voting in the capital Tehran, Khamenei called on Iranians to vote in large numbers and derided Western misgivings about the credibility of the vote.

"I recently heard that someone at the US National Security Council said 'we do not accept this election in Iran,'" he said.

"We don't give a damn," he added.

On May 24, US Secretary of State John Kerry questioned the credibility of the election, criticising the disqualification of candidates and accusing Tehran of disrupting Internet access.

All the remaining contenders except current chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili have criticised the conduct of diplomacy that has left Iran increasingly isolated and under painful economic sanctions.

Hossein, a 27-year-old voter in Tehran who belongs to the Basij hardline volunteer militia, said he would vote for Jalili, 47, Khamenei's national secu-

rity adviser and a former Revolutionary Guard who lost a leg in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

"He is the only one I can trust to respect the values of the revolution ... He feels and cares for the needy," Hossein said.

In Dubai, Iranian expatriate Zahra, 20, a first time voter, said she cast her ballot for Khamenei's diplomatic adviser Ali Akbar Velayati because of his expertise on world affairs.

The Guardian Council, a state body that vets all candidates, barred several hopefuls, notably former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, one of the Islamic Republic's founding fathers seen as sympathetic to reform, as well as Ahmadinejad's close ally Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie.

The Interior Ministry announced that voting, initially due to end at 1330 GMT, would be extended by several hours, Iran's Press TV reported in mid-afternoon. In the past, authorities have cited such extensions as evidence of a high turnout.

Iran's Sunni Muslim Gulf Arab neighbours are wary of Shia Iran's influence in Iraq and its backing for President Bashar al-Assad and his Lebanese allies Hezbollah in the Syrian war. The Sunni

Arab kingdoms are backing the rebels in Syria.

Of five conservative candidates professing unwavering obedience to Khamenei, only three are thought to stand any chance of winning the vote, or making it through to a second round run-off in a week's time.

Nuclear negotiator Jalili, who advocates maintaining a robust, ideologically-driven foreign policy, is seen as the main conservative contender.

The other two, Tehran mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and former foreign minister Velayati, have pledged never to back away from pursuing Iran's nuclear programme but have strongly criticised Jalili's inflexible negotiating stance.

They face Rohani, the sole moderate and only cleric in the race. Though very much an establishment figure, suspicious of the West, Rohani is more likely to pursue a conciliatory foreign policy.

With no reliable opinion polls in Iran, it is hard to gauge the public mood, let alone the extent to which Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards exert their influence over the ballot.

World population

FROM PAGE 16

The UN's latest "World Population Prospects" report said the number of people inhabiting the planet at the start of the next century could top 16.6 billion, or depending on the statistical model, could be as low as 6.8 billion.

In either case, the population in the world's poorest regions is anticipated to rise dramatically, the UN said.

In other findings, the UN study said that India would surpass China's as the world's most populous country around 2028, when both nations will have about 1.45 billion people.

India will continue to grow for several decades after that to about 1.6 billion and then slowly slip to 1.5 billion in 2100.

China's population is expected to start decreasing after 2030 and could reach 1.1 billion in 2100.

The number of inhabitants in the world's least

developed countries is projected to double, from 898 million inhabitants this year to 1.8 billion in 2050. The number will soar to 2.9 billion by 2100, the UN report said.

"Although population growth has slowed for the world as a whole, this report reminds us that some developing countries, especially in Africa, are still growing rapidly," Wu Hongbo, United Nations Undersecretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, said in a statement.

By contrast, population in the world's developed nations is expected to remain largely unchanged, inching upward from 1.25 billion this year to around 1.28 billion in 2100.

The report said the number of people living in the developed world would decline if not for immigration from poorer countries, which is projected to aver-

age about 2.4 million people a year from 2013 to 2050.

The report said that half of all population growth between 2013 and 2100 is expected to be concentrated in just eight countries: Nigeria, India, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Uganda, Ethiopia and the United States.

The study also highlighted the fast-growing number of seniors -- and not just in rich regions. Globally, the number of people 60 or older is expected to more than triple by 2100 to hover near 3 billion.

Longevity also is on the rise, the United Nations said.

The number of people aged at least 80 is projected to spike almost seven-fold to 830 million by the start of next century, up from 120 million this year and 392 million in 2050.

US SURVEILLANCE

China hits out at 'double standards'

THE HINDU ONLINE

China on Thursday declined to comment on whether it would involve itself in the case of Edward Snowden, the former Central Intelligence Agency Employee (CIA) employee who last month fled to Hong Kong, but hit out at Washington's "double standards" in the wake of fresh revelations about a widespread domestic and overseas cyber surveillance programme.

Mr. Snowden (29), who left Hawaii on May 20, told the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post in an interview published on Thursday that the National Security Agency (NSA) had been hacking into computers in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland for years. In the interview, the whistleblower said he was prepared to fight any extradition requests from the US, expressing faith in Hong Kong's judicial system.

Snowden's fate could, however, also be decided by Beijing, which can intervene in extradition cases handled by the Chinese Special Administrative Region (SAR) if it deems that a case impacts its defence, foreign affairs or "essential" public interest.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Thursday only said it had "no information to offer" when asked if Beijing had received any communication from the U.S. on the case, and how

the Chinese government would respond.

Spokesperson Hua Chunying did, however, tell reporters Beijing had noted Mr. Snowden's latest comments about U.S. activities aimed at Hong Kong and China.

"As we have repeatedly said, China is also one of the major victims of hacking and cyber attacks. China strongly advocates cyber security. We think that in terms of cyber security, the international community should carry out constructive dialogue and cooperation to jointly maintain peace, security, openness and cooperation of cyberspace".

Mr. Snowden's revelations have appeared to boost China's position amid recent tensions with the US on the issue of cybersecurity. While Washington has accused China of mounting organised hacking attacks targeting both government agencies and companies, Beijing has maintained that it was also the victim of similar attacks.

The revelations about the NSA's programmes coincided with talks last week between President Barack Obama and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in California, during which the issue of cybersecurity featured prominently.

Ms. Hua said Mr. Xi had raised China's concerns during the talks, making the argument that "China is a victim of cyberattacks, but we also advocate cyber

security".

She said China would "also like to carry out constructive dialogue and cooperation with countries including the U.S. based on mutual respect, mutual benefit and mutual trust", pointing out that both countries had agreed to establish a cyber security working group towards that end.

"We also think adoption of double standards," she added, "will bring no benefit to settlement of the relevant issue".

Diplomats here say Beijing is unlikely to directly involve itself in Mr. Snowden's case, taking into account its wider ties with Washington and also the recent sensitivities in Hong Kong over the Central government's perceived interference on a number of issues.

The State-run China Daily said in an article on Thursday the issue would test Sino-U.S. ties. Zhang Tuosheng, a researcher at the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies, told the newspaper cybersecurity "is still proving to be a new realm for cooperation between China and the U.S., especially in the wake of this surveillance controversy".

"Beijing and Washington, instead of criticising each other while hiding their own problems, should work together to facilitate a series of well-observed regulations," he said.