

Mother's memory kept Mobarak alive

Surviving second officer of MV Hope narrates near 42-hr ordeal at sea

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

During his near 42-hour ordeal at sea, the second officer of the Bangladeshi cargo vessel MV Hope, which tilted in the Andaman Sea, had at one point given up hope that he would make it out alive.

With rescue vessels repeatedly failing to pick him up and then leaving him, he was ready to let go. But the thought of his mother kept alight a glimmer of hope and had given him the strength to stay afloat.

Reaching his residence in Chittagong city's Agrabad Choumuhani area on Friday evening, Mohammad Mobarak Hossain, 24, narrated to The Daily Star his fight for survival near the coast of Phuket in Thailand.

The 17 crewmen had jumped into the sea around 1:30am on July 4 on receiving orders from the captain to abandon ship. Of them, 12 were able to swim to a life raft of the ship.

Captain Rajib Chandra Karmaker's outreached hand was only a few feet away on the raft but the strong current prevented Mobarak from grabbing a hold of it and pushed him away from the life raft.

Luckily all of the 17 crewmen were wearing lifejackets. "We were hopeful that we would be rescued when we jumped as the merchant ship MV Bux Moon was half a mile from where we were," said Mobarak.

But instead of keeping still just as the captain had asked when he radioed for help before abandoning ship, the rescue ship came speedily at him.

Despite having a searchlight fixed on him, MV Bux Moon hit Mobarak thrice, causing injuries to his head, right hand and legs. All this time, Mobarak was desperately trying to avoid the ship's propellers.

"I was about to lose consciousness when I saw the ship going away. After around one and a half hours, I found deck cadet Raek Fairooz floating beside me. We then clung on to each other," he said.

When the sun came up, Mobarak saw a rescue helicopter and a ship in the distance. However, his cries and frantic hand movements failed to draw their attention.

Meanwhile, Mobarak was trying hard to keep his eyes open. He was awake on duty for the last two days and the trauma was putting a heavy strain on his energy. "I fell asleep on the afternoon of July 4 but Fairooz held on to me," he said.

He awoke the next morning. His body throbbed with pain from the impacts with MV Bux Moon and he felt desperate, ready to cast off his lifejacket and end the suffering.

Luck was yet to look upon Mobarak as a merchant vessel, MV Bux Lagoon, came that afternoon and was able to pick up Fairooz. But Mobarak could not hold on to the ropes they were throwing from the ship.

When all hope seemed to have been lost, rescue came in the form of a Thai navy ship around 7:00pm.

Mobarak was rushed off to a hospital at Phuket in Thailand and shifted to another on July 8. He got release on July 23.

Nine of the 17 crewmen were rescued alive while bodies of another two were found floating at sea. The remaining six, including the captain, are still missing. MV Hope has been towed to the Malaysian coast.

Though the ordeal left a deep scar on Mobarak, he is happy to be alive and back home.

Tarique plotting to thwart democracy: AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif yesterday alleged that BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman was hatching conspiracies to hinder the country's democratic progress.

Addressing a press conference at the AL president's Dhanmondi office in the capital, he also asked Tarique, now in London, to come back and stand trial to prove that he is not guilty. He, however, did not elaborate on how Tarique is hatching conspiracies. Hanif, a special assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also protested the opposition leaders' comments against Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy and clarified Joy's speech.

At a Jubo League iftar event Tuesday, Joy said he had information that the AL would return to power. The BNP leaders criticised his speech on Friday, saying they had smelled a conspiracy in it.

Hanif said Joy intended to say that the AL had thousands of activists, many of them currently inactive, but if they could be made active and government's development works could be projected properly, the AL would return to power. Joy has learnt it from surveys, he claimed.

During the last BNP-Jamaat-led government, politicians, intellectuals, and journalists were tortured and killed as per the list, prepared from Hawa Bhaban, which was controlled by Tarique, said Hanif.

He said Tarique was an accused in the August 21 grenade attack case, but he went abroad for "treatment" and never returned. "He [Tarique] has misused parole facilities and as per law, he is a fugitive," said Hanif. "It is unfortunate that he is involved in numerous conspiracies to hinder country's democratic progress from there."



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MV Hope second officer Mohammad Mobarak Hossain, 24, who fought for nearly 42 hours for survival at the Andaman Sea where his ship tilted on July 4, narrates his ordeal to The Daily Star at his residence in Chittagong city on Friday. Sitting on his left is his mother. PHOTO: STAR

Cops disperse human chain demanding Rony's release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A human chain, demanding release of arrested Awami League MP Golam Maula Rony, was dispersed by police in front of Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday.

Around 150 supporters of Rony, claiming themselves as residents of Rony's area of Patuakhali, tried to form the human chain in the morning, said Assistant Commissioner of Ramna Police Station, Shibli Noman. However, they were not allowed to do so by the law enforcers, he said.

Later, they went to Muktangan to form the human chain, but police dispersed them, added Shibli Noman. On July 24, Rony was arrested in the capital on charge of assaulting two journalists.

UNIDENTIFIED VICTIMS OF RANA PLAZA COLLAPSE FBI to assist in matching DNA with family members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An FBI team will help identify the 321 unidentified bodies recovered from the Rana Plaza rubble by seeing if their DNA samples match those collected from people claiming to be their relatives, said Prof Sharif Akhteruzzaman yesterday.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) team, scheduled to arrive next month, will provide an advanced software programme, Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), said the national technical adviser of National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory (NFDPL).

The FBI team will train local experts on using the software which would help make the comparison process less time consuming and identify the bodies by September, he said.

Prof Akhteruzzaman was delivering a lecture, "Application of DNA in Mass Disaster Victim Identification", at Asiatic Society of Bangladesh's monthly general meeting at its premises in the capital.

market," he added. NFDPL collected samples of the 321 highly decomposed bodies and those of 520 people claiming to be their relatives. "Comparing such a large number of samples was not virtually possible with the software that we have at present," he said.

NFDPL used its present infrastructure to collect samples of 59 unidentified Tazreen Fashions fire victims in November, 2012 and identified 41 of them.

Prof Akhteruzzaman said they also successfully identified bodies of four army officials following the 2009 mutiny in Pilkhona.

He said he had several times suggested the higher authority to initiate the DNA profiling of unidentified bodies from different accidents and keep those in a national database, but to no avail. "This database can help reveal the identities even after many years," he said.

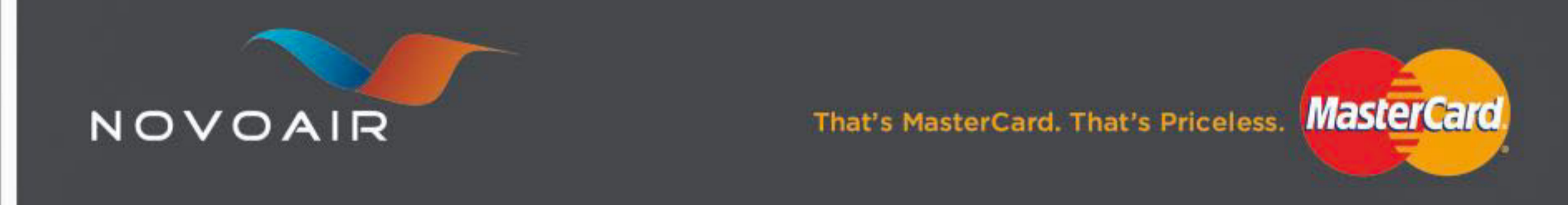
He added that a DNA act 2012 was being drafted which would help start the compilation for the database.

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