

Shipping dept surveyor suspended

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negligence of duty assigned to you," the order added.

A departmental case would be lodged against him, said the director general.

Meanwhile, the DoS authorities have asked the chief ship surveyor AKM Fakrul Islam to show cause why similar administrative actions should not be taken against him for the tragedy, the DG said, adding that the license of a DoS-enlisted naval architect Saidur Rahman was cancelled for having failed to ensure proper design and construction of the vessel.

Saidur Rahman, the architect who ensures compliance with the approved design during construction of a vessel, certified Pinak-6 as "satisfactory" despite it was built incorrectly

and was unstable, said the director general.

The architect, the vessel's owner, the Sukani (who was piloting the vessel in place of a certified master), the greaser (an assistant but was in charge of engine driver), and terminal lessees would also be sued at the marine court, he added.

According to Inland Shipping Ordinance, temporary permit must not exceed 45 days within which the fitness certificate must be renewed and issued upon compliance with the rules.

But in this case, Saifur first issued a 45-day permit for the vessel after its fitness certificate expired on April 30 this year, and then extended it for 30 days and again issued another 45-day permit.

The government inquiry also

revealed that Saifur did not make any declaration of survey findings of the vessel to the director general even once, although it was officially required, said sources.

Saifur could not be reached for his comments, despite several attempts over mobile phone.

Earlier, Saifur was withdrawn from Dhaka (Sadarghat) river port and attached to the DoS as the enquiry began.

A seven-member probe committee headed by a shipping ministry joint secretary submitted their findings to the ministry on September 11 identifying overloading as the prime cause behind the capsizing.

The ill-fated vessel was carrying around 250 passengers against a capacity of 85.

New pay scale

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meeting with the visiting IMF mission at his secretariat office.

The Pay and Service Commission, said the minister, will submit its report to the government in December.

Alongside recommending a new pay structure for the employees, the commission will suggest various reforms to the existing structure including financial and non-financial benefits of the employees, mentioned

Muhith. So it will take time to implement the recommendations after scrutinising those, he added.

The minister claimed that neither he nor the prime minister had said anything on implementation of the new pay scale in January next year.

When reporters pointed out that the finance minister on several occasions had hinted at implementing the pay commission report as soon as it would be made available, Muhith said

he only had expressed his intentions to implement it, but a time frame can only be estimated when the report is available with the government.

The government in November last year had formed the 8th Pay and Service Commission headed by former Bangladesh Bank governor Mohammad Farashuddin.

The commission was asked to submit its report within six months, but later its tenure was extended to December this year.



When two minibuses were virtually racing each other to the next bus stop, one of them struck a lamppost on the central reservation in front of the foreign ministry office in the capital yesterday. The lamppost then crashed onto a car on the other side of the street.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

11-day hilsa catching ban

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The production of the fish has doubled in the last one decade, reaching 3.85 lakh metric tons in 2013-14 from two lakh metric tons in 2003-04, according to fisheries ministry sources.

The production increased after imposing the bans on catching jatka (hilsa fry) too.

This year, the 11-day ban would also be imposed on catching all sorts of fishes in 14 districts along with four spawning grounds, the source added.

The spawning grounds are Kalirchar of Sandwip, Dhalerchar and Moulavichar of Hatia and Charfashion of Bhola.

Since hilsa lay eggs in plenty during this period (Ashwin-Kartik, five days

before and after of Baro Purnima), the government imposed the ban on catching it at the four points of the coastal area.

"For the last four years, we have been imposing the ban very strictly and this is really increasing the production of hilsa," said Masud Ara Momi, assistant director of Jatka Conservation Project.

In 2010-11 the production of hilsa was 3.4 lakh metric tons, it was 3.46 metric tons in 2011-12 and last year the production reached 3.85 metric tons, she said.

Hilsa fish has been facing many challenges for a last few years in the country's rivers because of water pollution and increasing salinity, say experts.

Hilsa breeding and migration grounds are shrinking in Bangladesh and hilsa eggs and small fries cannot survive in salty water because their chloride cell does not develop during their stay in it, they opined.

The fish was totally wiped out from 1,500-2,000km stretch of river including the Feni, Matamuhuri, upper Karnaphuli, Dhaleshawari, Kaliganga, Shitalakkhya, Dhanu, Chitra and Gorai rivers, said Department of Fishing sources.

In the Padma, Kalinadi, Madhumati, Arialkha, Kumar, Bhairab, Mahananda and Hurasagar rivers, the fish is nearly extinct. Even two decades ago, fishermen would have a huge catch of hilsa in these rivers.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia delivering her speech at Niaz Mohammad High School Ground in Brahmanbaria yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY BNP

It's all aimed to control judiciary

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immediately.

Dismissing ruling party leaders' claims that the BNP-led alliance was on the verge of a collapse, Khaleda, also chief of the combine, said it would become stronger and united in the days to come.

The former premier said she was not at all afraid of arrest, and that the government would face dire consequences if she was detained.

"They are trying to frighten me. But I do not bother about going to jail. I will be with you no matter where I stay. I have my party and people."

It was not she, but the Awami League men who would go to jail, as the BNP had all information and documents about the misdeeds and corruption of the ruling party men, said Khaleda.

Pointing to the ruling party leaders, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, she said, "You should be ready with your passports and visas so that you can flee the country hurriedly."

"Otherwise, people from all walks of life will block your way and you will not get the chance to escape."

She directed her party leaders to work together in case of her absence.

Khaleda urged people to be united to save the country from "this repressive, murderous and autocratic government".

The BNP chief said the AL leaders would leave the country at the time of a crisis, as they plundered thousands of crores of taka and siphoned those off.

Khaleda said the present government has to pay for its misdeeds and misrule.

Demanding disbandment of Rapid Action Battalion, the former prime minister said, "We had formed Rab in order to prevent terrorism in the country. But the present government is using the force to serve its political interests."

Top Rab official Col Ziaul Ahsan should be arrested immediately for his "alleged involvement in the seven murders in Narayanganj and the recent killings across the country," she said.

"The truth behind the Narayanganj murders could be unearthed if he [Ziaul] is interrogated. The prime minister has links with the incident. I do not understand how he could still hold his position in the elite force. He should be

terminated and arrested immediately for the recent killings and forced disappearances across the country."

On the government's claim that electricity generation is now 10,500 megawatt, the BNP chief said, "The information is absolutely false. The truth is that the production capacity at present is only 6,500 megawatt."

The rally was organised to demand a national election under a caretaker government and to protest abductions, killings, repression, the national broadcast policy and the constitutional amendment to impeach Supreme Court judges.

Around 200 arches were put up along the road from Ashuganj to the rally venue.

This was Khaleda's fourth visit outside the capital after the January 5 national elections boycotted by the BNP-led alliance.

Earlier, she had visited Rajbari, Munshiganj and Dinajpur to drum up public support for opposition's fresh anti-government agitation after the Eid-ul-Azha.

Govt seeks to certify journalists

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The move comes after newly appointed Council Chairman Justice Mamtaj Uddin Ahmed at a meeting with Information Minister Hasanul Huq Inu in mid-August underscored the need for certification of journalists, sources in the ministry said.

Contacted, Mamtaj said the proposals would be placed at the next meeting of the Press Council that would decide on the matter. Nine of the 14-member Council will be from among publishers, owners, editors and journalist leaders.

The previous Council members made many of the proposals, including that for fine and punishment, and the present Council just carried those forward to the information ministry. The issue of mandatory certification is a demand of journalists and it would enhance their dignity, he said.

The chairman added the amendment would come only if the Council agreed.

Only last month, the government formulated the National Broadcast Policy 2014, which drew criticism from among cross section of people. The government is formulating two more policies -- one for the booming online media and the other for the film industry.

Sources in the Press Council said broadcast media would also come under the Act. Once amended, anyone could lodge defamation cases with the council instead of with regular courts.

Bangladesh Press Council was established in 1979 to preserve the freedom of the press and improve the standards of

newspapers and news agencies. But critics say the Council has never been able to play an effective role to this end.

"We are hoping that the cabinet will approve in principal the proposed amendments by December," Council Secretary Shyamol Chandra Karmakar told this paper.

But before that its members will sit in a month to finalise the proposals.

"We will also take opinions from different stakeholders across the country," he said, adding that the certification system would prevent yellow journalism.

He described the initiative of taking certificates "a good step of the government" and said there was no alternative but to take certificates to enhance the quality of mass media.

Asked whether it would curb press freedom, he said it would rather protect the interest and freedom of journalists.

Prof AJM Shafiqul Alam Bhuiyan, chairman of Television and Film Studies at Dhaka University, said any decision in this regard should be taken in consultation with journalists.

Terming the initiative as a major change for mass media workers, he said it might give a negative message that the government was trying to control the sector.

The certification system, nevertheless, will improve the quality of journalism and check yellow journalism, he added.

Contacted, the information minister said the Council gave some proposals for strengthening the organisation but he sent those back to the Council for

further review.

Amendments to the Press Council Act is a demand of the Council itself and journalists also, he said, adding that aggrieved people did not get justice from the Council and the law needed to be amended for this reason.

Inu questioned as to why action would not be taken when journalists resorted to yellow journalism.

Upon getting the concrete proposal, the information ministry will consult the stakeholders before finalising the amendment.

Asked whether it would curtail press freedom, the minister said it would not.

Chief Editor of Boishakhi Television Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul said they placed some recommendations for strengthening the Council nine months ago but he could not recall those.

"As far as I remember, there was no proposal for lodging any defamation case with the Press Council instead of with the court," he said.

The News Today Editor Reazuddin Ahmed said if the Press Council was given the power to punish, it would be a "court of law instead of a court of ethics".

Terming any provision to cancel declaration of newspaper as dangerous, he said this power should not be at the hand of the government or the Press Council under any circumstances.

Rather the newspapers that violate ethics of journalism should be exposed, he said.

Regarding the certification, he said it would be wrong to implement the idea all of a sudden.

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Trade surplus for first time

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always higher than total exports, even in case of major drop in import payments.

"It is a rare achievement," Zahid Hussain, a leading economist of the World Bank in Dhaka, told The Daily Star.

"The phenomenon is quite amazing but the news is not a good one. Had exports performance outsmarted import performance, then it would have been a good piece of news for us," he said.

He added that the export sector performed badly, but the performance of the import sector was even worse.

The economist said the trade surplus despite very low export growth is largely a reflection of import decline. "Although we don't know the composition, it most likely reflects import decline across the board."

"If so, it is an indication of a slow and lacklustre economy. So, there is no reason to celebrate the trade surplus."

A central bank senior official said the fall in exports was a seasonal one.

"Exporters have already exported merchandises for the summer season ... but they have not yet shipped the products aimed at the winter season," said the official, seeking anonymity.

About the low import growth, the banker

said Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, the sole importer of petroleum products, brought in a huge quantity of petroleum products in the three to four months prior to July to help the country avoid any major price fluctuation in the international market.

Importers also brought in a huge quantity of consumer goods ahead of July to meet the high demand in Ramadan. The businessmen had some stocks and sold the unsold goods in July, he said.

He also said the import narrowed from a very high base in July last year. "As a result, it is showing a negative figure although it is going down gradually."

Imports of capital machinery were down by 13 percent. Raw materials imports also went down by 11 percent.

Likewise, food grain imports dropped 43 percent. Petroleum products, which form a major part of the imports, saw a slide of 43 percent in case of LC opening.

Imports have been on a downward trend for a couple of years due to weak investment demand caused by political uncertainty.

The investment has not peaked after the January 5 election, as investors are still worried about the return of volatile political arena in the near future.