



PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

World War II era aircraft carrier INS Vikrant (R11) in action during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. India is scrapping the vessel, the first aircraft carrier of the nation, which played a significant role during the war in 1971.

## INS VIKRANT '71 warship reduced to heap of scrap

AGENCIES

The hull of the decommissioned Vikrant, which "once controlled the sea and ended a war", was torn open on Friday at the breaking yard in south Mumbai, ending the journey of India's first aircraft carrier.

The first to fall, 15 minutes before sunset, was the angled deck, which will be remembered for launching the most iconic air raid which destroyed most ships at the harbours in then East Pakistan, playing a crucial role in the Liberation War, 1971.

"It is a national shame that we could not save an iconic ship like her," said Vice Admiral (Retd) IC Rao, who served onboard INS Vikrant as a chief engineer in 1975-76. He came to the breaking yard to bid her farewell, The Indian Express reported yesterday.

"She is irreplaceable. During the '71 war, she cut off the Pakistani Army's route and their morale was destroyed, shortening the war. I will keep complaining about the lack of public spiritedness, value of history and misgovernance. We sold our nation's pride for a mere Rs 60 crore," said Vice Admiral Rao.

"It was like seeing our own house being brought down because we could no longer afford to live in it. She has now joined the world of scrap."

In the 1971 war, after successfully evading Pak submarine PNS Ghazi in the Bay of Bengal, INS Vikrant unleashed furious air power on Chittagong, Khulna and Cox's Bazar, completely decimating any defensive capability there. After six days of unrelenting attacks, the Vikrant's Sea Hawk's ensured East Pakistan was fully contained from the sea.

INS Vikrant's performance in the 1971 war cannot be understated, said an India Today article titled "Ten reasons why India should preserve INS Vikrant."

With severe mechanical problems, including a failed boiler that potentially crippled flight operations and cruising speed, she still managed to bring a formidable fight to the enemy, earning her crew 2 Maha Vir Chakra and 12 Vir Chakra gallantry decoration.

The once-majestic aircraft carrier was bought in an e-auction by Mumbai-based IB Commercials Ltd.

"A team of around 200 people has been deployed to dismantle and break down the ship after we completed all legal and technical formalities and secured all requisite clearances from the agencies concerned," Abdul Karim Jaka, director of the company, told IANS from the breaking yard at Powder Bunder in southeast Mumbai.

IB Commercial Pvt Ltd, which had won the bid to scrap the ship for Rs 63.02 crore in January, now hopes to earn a margin of 2-3 per cent for the scrap.

The process, which started on Thursday with the first blow hammered on its front portion, is expected to be completed within 7-8 months.

More than 60 percent of the artefacts from the aircraft carrier, which was bought from Britain in 1957,

were moved to the Maritime History Society in Mumbai while rest was shifted to the Naval Aviation Museum in Goa before she was handed over for dismantling.

At the breaking yard, huge cranes separated the ferrous from the non-ferrous parts as soon as labourers removed parts of the fallen angled deck. Metal inspectors went about recording the content of each piece of scrap metal and separating it.

"Everything that comes of the ship is quality product. The navy is not restricted by budget when spending on a ship, especially an aircraft carrier, so there is no impurity," said Zuber Jaka, 22, director of IB Commercial.

Jaka said the non-ferrous parts of the ship earns the most and is exported. The ferrous scrap will be sent to the rolling mills and the "unrollable" parts -- referring to thermocol -- will be sent to the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board for "safe disposal".

If the ferrous parts sell for Rs 24 per kg, the non-ferrous parts sell for Rs 300 per kg, he said. And the ship with a gross registered tonnage of 21,067 tonnes, has a lot of it.

The company, which is paying Rs 1.40 lakh to the Mumbai Port Trust for using its land for ship breaking, will take another six to eight months to dismantle the entire ship.

"When we bought the ship, we were proud to get the opportunity to scrap 'desh ki shaan', but also a little sad. But the long delay and the wishes of many to preserve the ship made us feel bad about the lucrative deal we had struck," said Abdul Karim Jaka, another director of IB Commercial.

The Jaka family is now relieved that the scrapping had begun.

"The SC ruled in our favour as the authorities and the navy thought it was not feasible to convert it into a museum. We also offered to hand over the ship to those who protested against the dismantling after paying for the ship. Once everything failed and we got permission from the port trust to break the ship, we just got to work," he said.

Oblivious to Vikrant's historical achievements, the contractor who controlled the winch that brought down the angled deck said he cannot afford to be emotional. "This is my line of work so I cannot get emotional about these things. This is my second naval ship, and I have helped break many a ship in my 12 years of work. But this one was definitely the most famous," said Ghanshyam Yadav, the contractor.

Earlier, the Maharashtra government had expressed its inability to maintain Vikrant, which was decommissioned in January 1997. In January 2014, during the hearing of a PIL which opposed the plan to scrap the ship, the Defence Ministry told the Bombay High Court that it had completed its operational life.

As a memorabilia, the Jaka family has kept a metallic Ashok Chakra that was onboard the ship.

## 4,000 victims from Sirajganj

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country," said Professor Tasneem Siddiqui, chairman of the DU research unit.

Speaking at the press conference, Abul Hashem of Shahzajpur of Sirajganj said his elder brother Jubbar Ali, 40, a handloom worker, has been missing for seven months.

Jubbar was going to Malaysia by sea, though the family had no idea how he took it into his head to go abroad on a trawler.

Some 40 days later, Hashem got a phone call and heard a feeble voice of his brother saying he needed Tk 2.2 lakh for release from captivity in a place unknown to them.

Testimonies from other victims suggest Jubbar might have been held in Thai jungles.

"We felt he was tortured. We wanted him alive. Without giving any second thought, I borrowed money and sold land, and then sent the money to a contact number given to me," Hashem said.

"That was all. There has been no phone call since then. We tried, but failed to connect," he said, breaking down in tears. "Please tell us what we can do to get back my brother."

Sohel Rana, executive director of Development for Disadvantaged People, said risking such dangerous voyages to Malaysia is nothing new for some people in the northern district, but the trend has been rising over the last one year.

The NGO official gathered information from seven upazilas of Sirajganj. A number of families told him that some people were tortured and dumped into

the sea.

Referring to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Tasneem Siddiqui said 87,000 people have gone to Malaysia or Thailand illegally since 2012.

People have long been illegally migrating by the Bay, but the frequency has increased rapidly in recent years. Still, the authorities have not taken any notable measures to bring the perpetrators to book.

Apart from the manpower brokers, international criminal gangs, pirates of the Andaman and Thai coast, and employers in Malaysia and Thailand are also involved in this crime, she noted.

According to migration experts, shrinking of legal channels of labour migration to Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia could be a major reason why fortune seekers are opting for the risky sea journeys.

They demanded forming a taskforce comprised of officials from the home, foreign affairs and expatriates' welfare ministries and a regional anti-trafficking body with officials from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia.

Demanding investigation into all the cases of trawler rescue from the Bay, they called for a review of government-to-government recruitment arrangement for Bangladeshi workers, as only a few thousand can migrate through it.

Noor Khan, a director of rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, proposed setting up a taskforce, which will include representatives from NGOs working

on migration, and maintain liaison with law enforcers.

Also speaking at the programme, Prof Dr CR Abrar of Dhaka University said, "We will consider if we will collaborate with the government in observing the International Migrants Day on December 18 if it does not take drastic actions on the matter."

## 14 hurt in 'gas blast' at luxury London hotel

AFP, London

Fourteen people were injured at a five-star London hotel overnight after an explosion in the basement believed to have been caused by a gas leak, emergency services said yesterday.

About 500 guests had to be evacuated following the blast at The Churchill Hyatt Regency hotel shortly before midnight on Friday, London Fire Brigade said.

Five of the injured required hospital treatment, including two men with leg wounds, London Ambulance Service added.

It was unclear if the injured were hotel guests.

The evacuated guests were found rooms nearby, the hotel said.

"The explosion was in the hotel basement which has caused extensive damage to the basement and the ground floor. Five cars in a neighbouring street were also damaged," the fire brigade said.

## BNP, allies to wage movement if govt raises gas, power prices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led 20-party alliance will wage a tougher movement including non-stop hartal and blockade if the government increases power and gas prices in January next year.

The decision came at a meeting at the BNP chief's Gulshan residence last night.

The alliance decided to take up the public interest issue to kick off an anti-government movement and gradually turn it into a decisive campaign for an inclusive election under a non-party administration, meeting sources said.

At the meeting, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia made the alliance leaders promise that they would take to the street with her in that movement, a number of 20-party leaders who attended the meeting told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

"We all assured her that we will stay on the streets braving the bullets and repression," one of them said.

Khaleda also told the leaders they would have to get ready for any kind of sacrifice.

Khaleda slammed the Jamaat representative at the meeting.

"You [Jamaat] talk much but act less. You enforced hartals but your people were not there on the streets. Everything was normal," an Islamic party leader quoted Khaleda as saying.

Redwanullah Sahedi who represented Jamaat at the meeting kept mum at that time, meeting sources said.

## Challenged girl

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The girl was raped before being choked to death, said sources at Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue.

Police arrested a mason named Delwar, who lives at a mess next to the victim's house, in connection with the incident.

Moni, daughter of boatman Chan Mia, had her evening meal, and went out of their rented house for a stroll around 8:00pm on Friday.

"She did not return by an hour. She would rarely come home late," victim's mother Renu Begum told this correspondent yesterday.

Renu then went to the house of her sister Nazma at Paschim Islambagh to enquire about Moni. She was told that Moni had left Nazma's house around 8:15pm.

Renu and her relatives searched for Moni till 9:30pm but couldn't find her.

Around 10:00pm, two sons of Renu's landlord told her that they saw a body lying in front of a closed shop near Beribandh.

They then rushed to the place and found Moni's body in a plastic sack. The victim's mouth was stuffed with a bundle of paper, and pieces of cane were wrapped around her neck.

Police said since the area is densely populated, the rapist might have killed the girl for fear of being recognised.

Renu said her daughter was mentally challenged and didn't talk much.

Moni's sister Sonia said Delwar would occasionally enquire about Moni.

Police arrested Delwar around Friday midnight.

## Road crashes kill 5

STAR REPORT

Five people were killed in road accidents in Bhola, Jessore, Brahmanbaria, Sirajganj and Thakurgaon on Friday and yesterday.

Our Bhola correspondent reports, motorcyclist Foyej Sikder, 21, was killed as his bike hit a roadside tree near Mirza Bazar in Borhanuddin upazila yesterday.

Our Benapole correspondent reports, Rejoana Khatun, 5, daughter of Jabbar Morol, died as a human hauler hit her in front of her Goga Bazar residence in Sharsha upazila of Jessore yesterday.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports, Delwar Hossain Ripon Mia, 36, was killed as a pickup knocked a rickshaw carrying him on TA Road in the town on Friday evening.

Our Pabna correspondent reports, an elderly man was killed as a bus hit him at Shrikhol bus stand in Shahjapur upazila in Sirajganj on Friday night.

Md Abul Hossain, 70, of Nabbila village in the upazila, was crossing the road.

Our Thakurgaon correspondent adds, a woman was killed after a motorbike hit her in sadar upazila on Friday night.

## Biman to go tough on errant crew

Decides the national flag carrier's board

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Biman Board last night decided that any cabin crew bringing in goods worth \$300 or more would be handed over to police.

The decision came in the wake of the arrest of three Biman officials for alleged involvement in smuggling gold.

The board also decided to interrogate the general manager (security) of Biman to know why he allowed Mahmudul Haque Palash, who claimed to be the godson of Biman chairman, to enter and roam around the Biman offices freely interfering in the internal affairs of the national flag carrier.

The board held an urgent meeting at its Balaka Bhaban headquarters with Biman Chairman Air Marshal (retd) Jamal Uddin Ahmed in the chair yesterday.

In a 12-hour raid at Shahjalal International Airport, Uttara and Bashundhara last week, detectives arrested five members of a smuggling racket -- three Biman officials, Palash and an owner of a money exchange firm.

After yesterday's meeting, Khan Mosharruf Hossain, general manager (public relations) of Biman, told The Daily Star that Biman authorities have always been cooperating with law enforcement agencies.

## Carnival of souls

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having resemblance to those of the Indian epic Mahabharata and politicians of the Indian liberation movement, Tharoor, in reply to one of Ahmed's queries, said if he were to write the novel now he would have waited for a more tolerable time.

The vision of Hay was aptly captured by Pen International president John Ralston Saul in a session called Champion of the World.

Saul, the Canadian writer and activist, pointed out why words threaten those in power and suggested that conversation through festivals such as the Hay should be held between highly fractured groups of the society to ensure and promote freedom of speech.

In the morning Zia Haider Rahman read out excerpts from his debut novel 'In the Light of What We Know' which has received rave reviews in acclaimed international literary journals. He also answered questions from readers at a session chaired by Prof Ferdous Azim.

While adults flocked to the main stage to hear Zia speak, children played number and word games, and watched Bangla Sesame Street characters Tuktuki, Haloom and Ikra at Bottola.

Chinese author Jung Chang spoke about China's development and its reality. She also discussed her book Empress Dowager Cixi and shared her contribution to the Chinese women's movement in two separate sessions.

While Bengali and English poetry

About the reported corruption in recruitment of cabin crew, Mosharruf said such media reports were "false and fabricated".

He also trashed media reports that 34 Biman officials went into hiding after the arrest of the three Biman officials. "None of the reported Biman officials went into hiding," he said.

Following widespread allegations that flight and crew schedule were used for facilitating gold smuggling, the authorities yesterday decided to introduce automated scheduling system from November 30, he said.

Yesterday's meeting also discussed media reports on the retirement age of the pilots being extended to 60 years from 57, reportedly to keep arrestee Capt Abu Mohammad Aslam Shaheed in service.

However, the authorities at the meeting said the present leadership of Bangladesh Airlines Pilots' Association (Bapa) had appealed to Biman management to extend the service age.

Following the appeal, Biman asked Bapa to pay Tk 30 lakh as Biman had to spend the amount to fight a case filed by some Bapa members regarding the issue.

Biman extended the age limit on October 9 this year after receiving the compensation.

recitation kept the lawn occupied throughout the day, discussion on lyrics and poems took place at the main stage and Cosmic Tents.

Hay Festival Dhaka this year paid tribute to Shakespeare on his 450th birth anniversary with excerpts from three famous Shakespearean plays -- The Tempest, Hamlet and Macbeth performed by Dhaka Theatre, Dhaka University theatre department and Podatik TSC, followed by a discussion on the Bangla adaptation of Shakespeare by Aly Zaker and Sara Zaker.

BOOK, JOURNAL LAUNCHES Daily Star Books launched Guerilla a war-time memoir written by Shahzaman Mazumdar Bir Protik, at the Cosmic Tents in the afternoon.

Discussing the book, panelists Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, Prof Kaiser Haq and freedom fighter A Qayyum Khan praised it.

Calling Mazumdar's narrative very reticent, Prof Islam said: "He does not talk much about himself although it is his story."

Khan noted how Mazumdar kept his accounts limited only to the battle he fought on the ground.

"He does not deal with the politicians or the refugees," he said.

The latest edition of Six Seasons Review and Jamini, two journals of Bengal Publication, and This Old World, a photo essay by Zeeshan Khan, were also launched yesterday.

Six Seasons Review is edited by Prof Fakrul Alam and Jamini by Luva Nahid Choudhury.

Advertisement for Raffles Hospital. Headline: LOVE YOUR LIVER. Text: Did you know that non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is the most common liver disease affecting approximately 20 per cent of the general population in Bangladesh? Symptoms of NAFLD may include fatigue, pain in the upper right abdomen and weight loss. At Raffles Hospital, our multi-disciplinary team of specialists and nurses in internal medicine, gastroenterology, hepatobiliary surgery and dietetics operate within group practice to ensure that our patients received quality, integrated treatment and care. Our services include: Advanced endoscopic imaging and liver biopsy; Radiofrequency Ablation of liver tumors; Management of liver diseases in the gastrointestinal system; Minimally invasive treatment of liver cirrhosis; Pegylated Interferon with Ribavirin Combination Therapy; Liver Surgery. For enquiries and appointments, please contact our Patient Liaison Office at Phone: 88-0-2-8834976 | Hotline: 88-01730727272. Email: enquiries\_bangladesh@raffleshospital.com. Raffles Hospital is a Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited hospital and ISO 2001:2008 certified.