

Woman, child drown in trawler capsizes

7 others missing in Shitalakkhya

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A woman and a child drowned and seven people were missing as a trawler capsized in the Shitalakkhya after it collided head-on with another one in Sreepur upazila yesterday.

The dead are Asma Begum, 32, of Sutar Tapur village under Pagla Police Station in Mymensingh, and eight-month-old Sadiqun Nahar, daughter of Ashraf Uddin Sheikh of Kaoraid area in Sreepur.

Jasimuddin Mir, member of ward no-9 under Kaoraid Union Parishad, said the trawler from Patlashi sank in the river in Trimahani area around 12:45pm, with over 30 passengers on board. The vessels were carrying passengers on the Bormi-Trimahani and Patlashi-Bormi routes.

About 21 people managed to swim ashore, added Jasimuddin, who was monitoring the rescue operation. Both the trawlers were salvaged around 4:00pm.

Sadiqun's grandmother Mazida Begum, 45, had been missing till last evening.

Local people and members of Fire Service and Civil Defence were conducting a search operation in the area for the missing passengers.

AL man killed in Jessore

UNB, Jessore

An Awami League activist was hacked to death in the district's Jhikargachha upazila on Thursday night.

The deceased was identified as Humayun Kabir, a local activist of the ruling party in Karimali Kundipur village.

Police said a gang pounced on him in Panchpota area around 10:00pm while he was returning home from Battala in a bicycle, said officer-in-charge of Jhikargachha Police Station Mamunur Rashid.

Police recovered the body on Friday morning. Humayun might have been killed over business-related enmity, the OC said.



Two victims of the Jatrabari bus arson last night are being shifted from the DMCH burn unit's emergency to the observation ward. The two had to be carried on a single trolley as the limited-capacity emergency section got overwhelmed by patients after the arson. Inset, a victim lying on a bed at the observation ward.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Rice goes up by Tk 3 a kg

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Alamgir Hossain, a rice wholesaler at Badamtali-Babubazar market, the biggest rice wholesale depot in the capital.

For instance, he paid Tk 34,000, more than double the usual truck fare, to source rice from Chapainawabganj, a major rice milling hub and also a hotspot for political violence, early this week.

According to Alamgir, the cost of transporting rice from Kushtia, another major rice milling zone, rose around 40 percent since the non-stop blockade began on January 6. A 15-tonne capacity truck now charges around Tk 21,000, up from about Tk 15,000.

Moreover, rice traders have to bear

the loss if the cargo is torched. At normal times, suppliers take the full responsibility for carrying rice to the stores.

"This has made us very cautious about getting deliveries." All these factors have led to the price spike of rice, said the wholesaler.

Retailers are selling fine rice for over Tk 50 a kg, which was Tk 48 two weeks ago, said Mohammad Rajon, a rice retailer at Palashi kitchen market.

The prices of other types of the staple also went up in the last two weeks, he said.

Coarse rice, consumed by low-income people, sold Tk 35-37 a kg yesterday. The price was Tk 34-37 a kg a week ago, show the retail price data compiled by the state-run Trading

Corporation of Bangladesh.

Abdul Matin, a rice wholesaler at the capital's Mohammadpur Krishi Market, said traders usually keep a certain level of stock. But they cannot maintain it, as fewer trucks now carry rice to the capital.

Alamgir said around 300 trucks usually bring rice to the city every day but the number has dropped. Wholesalers now target weekends to get deliveries from millers to cut risk of attacks, he said.

However, Volanath Das, manager of wholesale shop Janata Rice at Badamtali-Babubazar market, said stocks at traders' end fell marginally and wholesalers were trying to maintain the usual level even if it meant paying higher transport fares and

taking risks of loss.

"There is enough stock to meet the demand in Dhaka city. There is nothing to be worried about," he added.

In the port city, prices of all types of rice rose by Tk 100-150 per 50-kg sack in the last two weeks.

Wholesalers are selling each 50-kg sack of fine rice for Tk 2,300-2,350, up from Tk 2,150-2,200 two weeks ago. The wholesale prices of coarse rice Swarna rose to Tk 1,560 per sack from Tk 1,450.

The number of trucks bringing supplies to the port city dropped for the unrest, said Md Jamal Hossain, general secretary of Chaktai Traders Association.

More than a hundred truckloads of rice used to arrive at the market. The

30,000 youths to be trained in IT

BCC signs deal with UK firm

BSS, Dhaka

Ernst and Young (EY), a UK-based leading global professional services company, will train 30,000 Bangladeshi youths in information technology to meet the demand of skilled manpower for the country's IT industry, officials said.

An agreement in this regard was signed between the World Bank-financed LICT project of Bangladesh Computer Council under Information and Communication Technology Division and EY on January 13.

Of the 30,000, EY will impart Top UP IT (specialised) training to 10,000 IT and science graduates and foundation training to 20,000 youths of higher secondary level within three years, mentioned the officials.

State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak said the government has been developing a pool of 34,000 IT and IT Enabled Services (ITES) human resources of sufficient quality to support the growth of the country's IT/ITES industry.

The LICT project, he added, has launched a Fast Track Future Leader programme to create 4,000 IT leaders in the country.

The EY will also develop quality assessment and certifications mechanisms and program priority skills to meet the immediate needs of the IT and ITES sectors, mentioned Palak.

Only if the two wish

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two leaders took necessary steps in this regard.

Hasina and Khaleda sat with their senior party leaders just once since the crisis began brewing since early January. But senior leaders were not allowed to discuss the situation, let alone offering any suggestion to overcome the stalemate, meetings sources said.

Hasina, the prime minister, has opted to use administrative power to counter the BNP-led alliance movement.

In public, many ruling Awami League leaders and ministers support the government measures. In private, they speak differently, however.

When the party chief becomes prime minister and senior leaders become ministers, the party loses importance, said a senior AL leader, wishing not to be named.

"Party leaders who are in the cabinet think they do not need to sit in party forums to discuss the political issue. They think whatever they do is the party's political stance. Therefore, we do not have any say on the party strategy for tackling the current situation," the leader added.

Some AL leaders said the organisational weakness of the party prompted

the PM to bank on the administrative actions to handle the situation.

The government has used law enforcement agencies to keep Khaleda confined to her Gulshan office for two weeks. The BNP headquarters in Nayapaltan is still under lock and key.

The government has directed law enforcement agencies to go tough on the opposition to protect the country's "democratic process" by foiling the movement that has turned violent.

Some ministers and AL leaders have even demanded the arrest of Khaleda for "instigating violence".

The AL presidium, the highest policymaking body, sat last time in April 2013.

Its central working committee, the highest decision-making body, has yet to sit to discuss the present situation. Leaders of the AL central working committee and some senior leaders sat on January 8 for a brief meeting. At the meeting, Hasina made a brief statement warning Khaleda and her party men against street violence. The AL advisory council, considered its think-tank, remains dysfunctional for long.

The story in the BNP camp is more unpleasant.

To some BNP standing committee

members, it remains a mystery why on January 5 Khaleda called the country-wide blockade. There was no discussion among the party policymakers in this regard.

Some newspapers had quoted a number of standing committee members that the party might call a two or three days' countrywide hartal if the government foiled their planned rally on January 5. But Khaleda's call for the nonstop blockade surprised her senior party colleagues.

Many in the party said Khaleda was being guided by her son Tarique Rahman, BNP senior vice-chairman, who has been living in London since middle of 2008, to take a hard line.

Finally on January 19, she sat with some senior leaders, including standing committee members, at her Gulshan office. At the meeting, two senior leaders had tried to voice their concerns over the nonstop blockade. But Khaleda shut them up, meetings sources said.

After the meeting, she told reporters the blockade would continue until the government created an atmosphere for holding a free and fair election.

Even her party policymakers were not aware of the seven-point proposal Khaleda unveiled at a press conference

on December 31. She did not discuss those in any other party forum.

Last time she sat with her advisers was on November 10 last year and with the standing committee members on November 13.

Two months ago, Khaleda sat with the top leaders of the components of the BNP-led alliance. At the meeting, alliance leaders empowered Khaleda to make all decisions on their behalf.

The BNP is also faced with organisational weaknesses; not many leaders are seen on the streets during the blockade.

Contacted, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the two leaders claimed that their politics were aimed at promoting democracy. But there are credible evidence of "deficit" of democracy and democratic practices.

"They talk about democracy but we hardly see any democracy within their parties. Some can raise the question that how will they establish democracy in the country if they cannot ensure democracy in their parties?"

"Party leaders and activists have no role in decision-making and it is tantamount to breaching the party constitution. While in power, both the leaders run the country the way they run their parties."

US for putting more

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responsibility to take back its nationals," she added.

The US assistant secretary left Dhaka yesterday.

Richard, however, did not favour the Rohingya refugees settling in a third country. "Our dream is to see they [Rohingyas] are given a peaceful place to live [in Myanmar]. I know it is possible but that's a dream," she said.

Reiterating the US government's gratitude to Bangladesh for sheltering hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people over the decades, she said it became an "important model" for the rest of the world.

Sharing her experience of visiting the refugee camps on Thursday, she said the refugees also acknowledged that "this is a generous move" of Bangladesh and they are very grateful.

In response to a question, she said the Rohingya refugees in the two camps in Cox's Bazar prefer to stay in Bangladesh despite a dearth of ideal living condition.

"When I asked them where they would like to live, they said they

would rather be here [in camps] even the conditions are not perfect than living in Myanmar. They enjoy a certain amount of freedom here that they don't have in their home country," said the assistant secretary.

Prior to her arrival in Dhaka on January 20, Richard made a six-day visit to Myanmar from January 14.

In Myanmar, Richard visited the Rakhine State from January 16-19 and had meetings with state and local government officials, representatives of the Rohingya and Rakhine communities, and international and non-governmental organisations and discussed the political and humanitarian situation in Rakhine State. She also participated in the second US-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue in Naypyidaw on January 14-15.

She said the situation in Rakhine State was not improving with the spirit of democratic reform in Naypyidaw.

The assistant secretary said Bangladesh was not the only country raising the issue with Naypyidaw. "This has become a major piece of foreign relations between many countries and Myanmar."

King Abdullah passes away

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Sheikh Hasina, Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad, Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia have expressed deep shock at the death of the Saudi king. The president will fly to Saudi Arabia today to pay last respects.

In Riyadh, the royal court said Abdullah, believed to be around 90, died at 1:00am local time.

King Abdullah, one of the richest men in history, was carried in a simple white shroud to an unmarked grave in a Riyadh cemetery where many of his commoner subjects rest, in keeping with ascetic traditions.

The Saudi state school of Wahabi Sunni Islam holds ostentatious displays of grief or mourning to be sinful, akin to idolatry, writes Reuters.

There was no official mourning period in Saudi Arabia and flags around the kingdom all flew at full staff. Despite his apparent popularity among his subjects, there were no spontaneous gatherings on city

streets to mark his passing.

Officials did not disclose the cause of Abdullah's death, but the late king had been hospitalised in December suffering from pneumonia and had been breathing with the aid of a tube.

Salman, 79, moved quickly to consolidate his hold on power and vowed to maintain a steady course for the conservative kingdom.

He joined Gulf rulers and leaders including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for a funeral service at Riyadh's Imam Turki bin Abdullah mosque.

Citizens were invited to pledge allegiance to Salman at the royal palace.

In his first public statement as the new ruler, Salman vowed to "remain, with God's strength, attached to the straight path that this state has walked since its establishment".

He called in televised remarks for "unity and solidarity" among Muslims and vowed to work in "the defence of the causes of our nation".

Another of the late monarch's half-

brothers, Muqrin, was named crown prince.

Moving quickly to clear uncertainty over the transition to the next generation, Salman named the interior minister, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, as second in line to the throne.

He also appointed one of his own sons, Prince Mohammed, as defence minister, reports AFP.

Since the death in 1952 of the kingdom's founder, King Abdul Aziz bin Saud, the throne has passed systematically from one of his sons to another.

Salman is a stalwart of the royal family credited with transforming Riyadh from a backwater to a thriving capital during his half-century as governor.

He is widely expected to follow closely in Abdullah's footsteps, in foreign and energy policy as well as in making moderate reforms to the deeply conservative kingdom.

BANGLADESH MOURNS

The national flag will be flying at half-mast at all government, semi-government and autonomous organi-

sations and educational institutions. Special prayers will be offered in all mosques and religious institutions for the salvation of the departed soul.

President Abdul Hamid and his entourage will leave for Riyadh by a special flight of Biman at 10:30am and return tomorrow, President's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told The Daily Star.

In a condolence message, Hamid said, "On behalf of the people of Bangladesh and on my own behalf, I express my deepest condolences on the sad passing away of the custodian of two Holy Mosques -- His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. It is, indeed, an irreparable loss for the Royal family, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Muslim Ummah and the whole world."

The prime minister in her condolence message said, "Bangladesh has lost one of her great caring brothers and generous well-wishers, and the Muslim Ummah has lost its guardian and the world has lost a great leader."

OBAMA HAILS 'VALUED' ALLY

Under Abdullah, who took the

throne in 2005, Saudi Arabia has been a key ally of Washington in the Arab world, most recently joining the US-led coalition carrying out air strikes against the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq.

President Barack Obama was quick to pay tribute to Abdullah as a "valued" ally.

"The closeness and strength of the partnership between our two countries is part of King Abdullah's legacy," Obama said in a statement shortly after the monarch's death.

Other tributes came in from foreign leaders, with French President Francois Hollande hailing Abdullah as "a statesman whose work profoundly marked the history of his country".

British Prime Minister David Cameron said he was "deeply saddened" and that Abdullah would be remembered for "his commitment to peace and for strengthening understanding between faiths."

Wary of the rising influence of Islamist movements, Saudi Arabia has been a generous supporter of

Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi since the army's ouster of Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Egypt declared seven days of official mourning for Abdullah.

Saudi Arabia has also played a key role in supporting opposition to Iran-backed President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, allowing US troops to use its territory to train rebel fighters.

OIL PRICE SURGE

Oil prices jumped yesterday as the news of the death of Saudi King Abdullah added to uncertainty in energy markets already facing some of the biggest shifts in decades.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate crude futures rose more than 2% to a high of \$47.76 a barrel in early Asian trading. International benchmark Brent futures opened up almost 1.5% higher at \$49.10 per barrel.

"This little spike in prices is understandable. But this is a selling opportunity in our view. It should be sold off quickly and it won't last long at all," Mark Keenan of French Bank Societe Generale told Reuters.