

19 pilgrims die in Saudi road crash

At least 19 pilgrims died, all of them Egyptian, and 22 were injured early yesterday when their bus overturned in western Saudi Arabia, authorities in both countries said.

The tourism ministry in Cairo said 19 Egyptian pilgrims and a child were killed and 15 were injured in the accident.

"Nineteen people were killed when the bus carrying them turned over on the Hijra road" between the coastal city of Jeddah and the holy city of Medina, Saudi Red Crescent spokesman Khaled Ben Messaed al-Sihli said.

"All the bus passengers have the same nationality of an Arab country except the driver who is Asian," he said.

Another 22 people were injured including some who were badly hurt, Sihli added.

Millions of Muslims visit Saudi Arabia each year for the year-round umra minor pilgrimage and the annual hajj pilgrimage.

Jordan said on Wednesday that 14 pilgrims died and another 36 were injured in another bus accident in southern Jordan near the Saudi border.

The country's civil protection service said the driver lost control of the vehicle which turned over 320 kilometres (about 200 miles) south-east of Amman.

A stampede during the hajj last September killed about 2,300 foreign pilgrims, according to data from foreign officials.

Air strikes

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The Russian air force have been pressing an advance to try to reclaim the ancient city.

18 IS FIGHTERS KILLED
On yesterday alone, at least 18 IS fighters were killed in at least 70 strikes on the Palmyra area, the Observatory said, as clashes pitted loyalist troops against jihadists on the ground.

Russia, a key backer of the Syrian regime, on Monday ordered the withdrawal of most of its armed forces from Syria, but continues to strike jihadist targets, particularly around Palmyra.

Senior Russian commander Sergei Rudskoi on Friday said Russian jets were flying around two dozen bombing sorties daily to back up the Syrian government's bid to recapture Palmyra.

"Government troops and patriotic forces with the support of the Russian air force are carrying out a large-scale operation to liberate Palmyra," he told journalists in Moscow.

Roughly 1,800 Syrian civilians including more than 400 children have been killed in Russian air strikes since Moscow launched its aerial campaign on September 30, according to the Observatory.

Moscow has denied claims that its air force has repeatedly hit civilian and non-jihadist rebel targets.

More than 270,000 people have been killed in Syria since the conflict began in March 2011 with anti-government protests.

An unprecedented ceasefire negotiated by Russia and the United States has largely held since February 27 but the truce does not apply to jihadists.

UN mediator Staffan de Mistura has urged Damascus to make concrete proposals in the coming days on a political transition, following a week of peace talks in Geneva.

But a source close to the regime said yesterday there had been "no progress" at the meetings and criticised the UN envoy for putting pressure on the Syrian government.

Not so SWIFT

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Department, which is investigating the case, said it may seek cooperation of other local and foreign organisations investigating into the heist, which traversed at least four countries.

The CID is due to sit with officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation today, said Mirza Abdullah Baqui, special superintendent of police.

The FBI has already started its work in Philippines, through which \$81 million of the stolen money were laundered.

The CID has already collected a large chunk of data from several BB computers and is currently analysing them.

Baqui said the delay in the filing of the case by the BB has made their investigation difficult. The central bank filed the case on March 15, more than one month after the heist occurred.

Tarique spoke

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Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The BNP leader left the country in 2008 and has been in London ever since.

The petitioner said Tarique had been making "abusive and seditious statements about Bangabandhu, violating the constitution". Tarique is a fugitive in the eyes of law as he did not surrender to any court although several arrest warrants were issued for him in different cases, she added.

7 'traffickers' held

Rab says victim sent to Libya, family forced to pay ransom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion yesterday detained seven suspected traffickers on charges of illegally sending a Bangladeshi national to Libya and realising ransom from his family.

The Bangladeshi national was sent to Libya via Sudan on a "visit visa" obtained by fake documents, said Rab officials.

Victim Samar Ali of Sylhet was even sent to the North African country under a fake name "Faruq Mia," added the Rab officials.

Following a complaint filed by his father Konu Mia, the Bangladesh Embassy in Tripoli rescued Samar on Friday from the trouble-torn Benghazi, Lt Col Khandker Golam Sarwar, commanding officer of Rab-3, told a press briefing at the Rab headquarters in Tikatuli yesterday.

The Rab-3 detained Abdul Kaiyum, 44, Khokon Ahmad, 30, Jahangir Alam, 30, Nasir Uddin, 40, Faruqul Islam Rasel, 31, Rubel Hawladar, 29, and Badal Hawladar, 35, raiding different areas in the capital and elsewhere since March 12.

The elite force said the traffickers had their cohorts in Sudan who managed a three-month "visit visa" for Faruq.

They arranged a fake passport, national identity card, birth certificate and other documents under the fake name and sent Samar to Sudan, said the Rab official.

"They held him along with eight other Bangladeshi hostages in Sudan. They also extracted Tk 2.35 lakh in ransom from his family and handed him over to the Libyan traffickers," he added.

The traffickers boarded the victims in a truck and took them to Libya crossing the Sudanese border, he further said.

Earlier, Konu paid Tk 2.55 lakh of Tk 4.5 lakh in advance to one Kaiyum before sending Samar abroad.

The father filed a complaint in this regard as the traffickers demanded Tk 1 lakh more holding his son hostage in Benghazi.

Samar is now in the custody of the Bangladesh mission in Tripoli and is expected to return home within a month after having his passport, he said.

Samar was sent to Sudan along with four to six other Bangladeshis at that time. The other persons have yet to be identified, the Rab official added.

After taking money from the families, the traffickers in Libya involve them in painstaking works with low allowance, he said.

Double blow

FROM PAGE 1
"This will not be the end of my career. If my action does get deemed illegal, I can come back with another test," said Sunny.

In the same vein, Taskin said: "I'm not afraid of anything. I have gone through tougher times during the BPL. I had to fight with my injury and a lot more. I'm not scared."

Once the results became public however, they could not be reached for comment.

As a result of the ICC's decision Bangladesh will be allowed to replace these two players. According to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), slow left-armers Sajid and off-spinner Shuvagata Hom are likely to replace Sunny and Taskin respectively.

The news of the suspension caused quite a stir among Bangladesh fans and it was an aspect that was quite evident on social media.

Bangladesh's fans, had already been criticising the ICC ever since both bowlers were reported following the game against the Netherlands on March 9 and the surge of critical comments further increased once the bowlers were officially suspended from bowling yesterday.

The question that seemed to dominate the cricketing fraternity of the country was the timing of the call on the actions of the bowlers.

Both Sunny and Taskin had taken part in several international competitions, from the World Cup in 2015 to the recently concluded Asia Cup, but not once were they reported.

To be called for a flawed bowling action during the mega event, despite not appearing to have undergone any changes to their bowling actions, was an aspect that surprised many in the cricketing fraternity.

Former national captain Aminul Islam, who currently works for the ICC as a cricket development officer, said that he was surprised to see Taskin's action being reported.

"I have been following Taskin for a very long time and I never thought he was a suspect bowler. I don't quite know which area the tests focused on. But since his action has been deemed illegal he now needs to go through the process.

"He is still a very young bowler and I am sure this won't affect his career as much," said Aminul.

Former national captain Roquibul Hasan, who has also officiated many domestic games in Bangladesh as a match referee, voiced a similar sentiment.

"To be honest with you, I was a bit

surprised when they were both called since the same match referees and umpires saw them in previous games. Why now? To the naked eye Taskin does not seem to be a suspect bowler.

"Having said that it would be wrong to say that the bowlers can't do anything wrong now just because they didn't do anything wrong in the last two years. I don't think that this is a part of a controversy against Bangladesh. It's sad but they just need to go through the corrective measures and come back," said Roquibul.

There were a number of other former national players who spoke along the same line as Aminul and Roquibul but preferred not to be quoted on record.

Myanmar rebels pin hope on new civilian president

AFP, Yangon

An ethnic rebel group locked in conflict with Myanmar's military is eager to broker peace with the new civilian president, a spokesman said yesterday, as the incoming government gears up to tackle the country's long-running insurgencies.

Myanmar's new leadership, steered by Aung San Suu Kyi and her presidential proxy Htin Kyaw, will take office at the end of the month, concluding a protracted power hand-off from the outgoing army-backed government.

One of their toughest tasks will be snuffing out civil wars between the national army and a patchwork of ethnic minorities in the resource-rich borderlands.

A recent surge of violence in northeastern Shan state, which has hosted multiple rebellions over the decades, has displaced more than 6,000 people since early February, according to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The fighting pits the military against the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), one of several rebel armies that did not sign a broad ceasefire agreement pushed by the government last year.

A TNLA spokesman yesterday said its people are weary by the ongoing clashes and ready to work with the country's new civilian leader Htin Kyaw, who was elected in a parliamentary vote last week.

Zoha still missing

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The 32-year-old information technology expert was allegedly picked up by plainclothes men around 1:00am while returning to his Kalabagan house with a friend on a CNG-run auto-rickshaw.

Following the incident, the family went to three police stations to file a general diary but the police allegedly refused to accept it.

Referring to the home minister's comments, Mahbul said if Tanveer was involved in any criminal offense, he should be nabbed and produced before a court.

Asked whether law enforcers picked up Tanveer (in connection with the probe into the Bangladesh Bank reserve heist), Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal on Thursday told journalists that he could not tell for sure at that moment.

11 indigenous girls rescued in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Detectives rescued 11 indigenous teenage girls along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf area yesterday.

Police said the victims, aged between 12 and 14, were from Bandarban's Rowangchhari and Sadar upazillas. They studied at Mitingachhari Buddhist temple in Rangamati's Kaptai area and stayed at a hostel there.

On February 26, Usiri Bhikkhu (monk), head of the temple, sent the girls to a temple at Mongdu in Myanmar so that they could attend a funeral ceremony of a monk there, said the victims.

Their families in the meantime contacted Usiri to know about the girls. Failing to find a satisfactory answer from Usiri about the girls' whereabouts, Sang Pua Marma, one of the victim's fathers, filed a human trafficking case with Rowangchhari Police Station on March 11.

Police arrested the Usiri the same day, said Omar Ali, officer-in-charge of the police station.

In Myanmar, the girls stayed at Naicha Dong Buddhist temple, police said.

Yesterday, a team of detectives led by Manzur Alam, officer-in-charge of Bandarban Detective Branch of police, rescued the girls along the Myanmar border in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf area with the help of Myanmar's Border Guard Police (BGP).

Manzur claimed that they sent a letter to the BGP on March 17, informing them about the girls. "They [the BGP] communicated with Charana Bhikkhu, head of Naicha Dong Buddhist temple, who then arranged the girls' return," said the OC.

Victim Pai Nu Ching Marma said they attended the funeral ceremony of a monk in Mongdu.

She said Chara Na Bhikkhu, head of the Buddhist temple in Myanmar, arranged their accommodation at the temple's hostel where around 414 other Myanmar children study.

"Charana promised us to provide quality education and wanted to keep us there. But we wanted to return home," said another victim Ma Thoai Ching Marma.

"The victims would be sent to Bandarban Sadar Hospital for medical tests tomorrow [today]", OC Manzur added.

Coal-laden

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Earlier, an oil spill caused an immeasurable damage to the world's largest mangrove forest after an oil tanker named Southern Star sank on December 9, 2014 in the same river.

In May last year, a cargo vessel carrying 200 tonnes of fertiliser sank in the Bhola River in Sarankhola Range of the Sundarbans.

Environmentalists, political parties and social-cultural groups have been demanding a ban on any traffic movement on this river route since then.

A United Nations team following the oil spill suggested closing commercial traffic in the Shela River.

A government committee that probed the oil spill too recommended a permanent halt to the operation of cargo vessels through the river.

84-year-old

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had shattered the doors," she told The Daily Star about the ordeal of the night.

Nayer, 60, went straight to her father who has been suffering from old age ailments and also back pain for the last one month. The two followed some other residents of the building towards the stairs to the roof.

"The staircase was dark. The heat and smoke from the fire was unbearable and my father almost choked with the smoke," she said.

She took a scarf from another woman and wrapped it loosely around her father's mouth and nose so that he could keep breathing.

After reaching the roof, she found many other residents already there. "We felt so thirsty. Many were shouting 'water, water'."

People were trapped in the roof for over an hour, said Nayer.

Neighbours from adjacent buildings focused some light on the victims and hurled small bottles of water at the roof.

"We survived by drinking the water and spraying some on the roof which was heated up," she said.

Locals informed the police and fire brigade about the fire.

Around 3:00am, Nayer with the help of firefighters took her father downstairs. A relative took the retired teacher to their Dhanmoudi house while Nayer went to her uncle's in Gulshan.

Nayer's cousin, who lived in the apartment next to her, was injured in the accident. Yesterday, she attended the injured at City Hospital in Mohammadpur.

The 60-year-old has no idea whether they would be able to return to the building which was damaged in a suspected gas explosion.

Airport deal

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Airport in Dhaka, said Minister Rashed Khan Menon yesterday.

Before this, the cabinet committee on economic affairs and the cabinet committee on purchase will approve a technical project proposal (TPP) today, making way for the deal with the company without any bidding.

An inter-ministerial meeting yesterday approved the TPP with some changes to the proposals prepared following negotiations with two British security service companies, said the minister while briefing journalists after the meeting at the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) office.

The minister neither mentioned the company which may get the job nor did he disclose the amount to be paid for its service.

Meeting sources said the two companies are Redline Assured Security and Restrata. And Redline is expected to get the contract for airport security screening for two years.

The company on Friday demanded Tk 75 crore, but yesterday it agreed on Tk 73.98 crore. "The amount might even be smaller as the final negotiation is still going on," said an official who participated in the meeting.

The minister said, "We'll sign the deal for two years, but after every six months we will review the company's performance."

He added that the hired company will also train local screeners.

According to sources, meetings of

the cabinet committee on economic affairs and the cabinet committee on purchase are usually held on Wednesdays with the finance minister in the chair. But to get the project approved, the meetings will be held today.

The project is the only agenda for the meetings.

According to government rules, if any job involving over Tk 10 crore is awarded to any company without bidding, it requires permission from the cabinet committee on economic affairs, sources mentioned.

On March 8, the British government imposed a ban on direct cargo flights from Dhaka citing security concerns until further notice.

Besides, British Prime Minister David Cameron in a letter to the Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina called for a visible improvement of airport security by March 31 to avoid further measures like banning of Biman's direct passenger flights from Dhaka to London.

Against this backdrop, British High Commissioner Alison Blake and other UK delegation members during the March 13 meeting suggested hiring a foreign company for security management at the airport.

The government primarily selected Redline and Restrata from a list of four foreign security companies suggested by the British envoy at the meeting.

The two other companies are G4S and Westminster Security Services.

No coordination

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In most of the cities around the world, mayors have authority over service organisations, said Mubasshar, also former president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh. But the mayors of Dhaka do not have power over vital organisations like Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Titas, Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd (DPDC) and Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk).

The DNCC was digging at a spot close to the Banani building without any coordination between Titas Gas and it. Titas Gas does not even have layouts of age-old pipelines and so it lacks data about their present status, Mubasshar said.

Utility service providers should take safety measures before digging, he said, adding that there would otherwise be chances of damaging emergency pipelines.

He also suggested turning off both front and back keys of gas burners and keeping windows of kitchens open even at night.

During the construction of a building, kitchens should be built against the exterior wall so that leaked gas can easily pass out, Mubasshar said, suggesting that pipelines in a building should be installed in a way that all of them can be disconnected with a key when an accident occurs.

Architect Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bapa, said mayors would have to take steps to ensure better coordination between utility service providers.

Everyone from citizens to those organisations should obey rules to avoid this kind of accident, he added.

While Titas is responsible for examining gas connections on a regular basis, the building owners should take necessary steps to ensure safety of the residents, Iqbal said.

DNCC Mayor Anisul Huq told The Daily Star that the city corporation had held meetings with Rajuk and Wasa following the incident and that it had

plans to sit with them and other utility service providers in every three months to ensure better coordination.

About the gas explosion at Banani, he said there was negligence on the side of Titas. DNCC contractor filed a written complaint with it in the morning of March 17 but there was no response.

The DNCC has already asked the authorities concerned to take actions against those responsible for the incident, Anisul added.

An official of Titas said a radio operator at the emergency section, Md Alamgir Hossain, had been suspended for negligence of duty.

A five-member probe committee has been formed to submit a report within seven working days and to take action against other officials, if found guilty, he said.

RESIDENTS MOVE THEIR GOODS
Residents of the damaged building were allowed to take away their valuables from the premises yesterday.

They, however, failed to carry heavy furniture out as the main gate was damaged severely.

Shohidul Islam, manager of Asset Developer, the firm that constructed the building, said all 20 flats had been affected by the fire.

Police will look after the building after inhabitants leave the premises, he added.

Naved Imtiaz, son of building owner Shamsul Alam, who suffered 13 percent burns, was shifted to City Hospital from United Hospital Friday night, said Nayer Rahman, a resident of the building.

Meanwhile, Titas in a press release issued yesterday said a team would be present during the ongoing work on roads, drains and footpaths by the DNCC at Banani and Gulshan to ensure safety of the residents.

People are requested to lodge complaints with the team if they find any symptom of gas leaks during the work. The numbers are 01823-632303, 01715-411593 and 01711352877.

Grieving mom turns

FROM PAGE 16
Japan, and the tragic incident left her a shattered woman. But she eventually found a way to deal with the grief by devoting her own life to fulfilling her son's dream.

Ruizhe had told her about his plans to plant trees in northern China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous region in order to stop the advancing desert, so Yi decided to fulfil his dream herself.

So Yi and her husband used Ruizhe's insurance money - 30 million Yen (nearly \$270,000) - to set up a non-profit called Green Life in 2003. They didn't have much knowledge of agriculture or forestry back then, and their first planting season was unsuccessful. With less than 200 mm rainfall that year, the saplings were blown away by strong winds and shifting sands.

The couple did not lose heart though. They consulted local forestry experts and managed to get several saplings to take root the next season. "It seemed that my son's spirits bestowed good fortune on us - it rained heavily when we finished," Yi said. "Ever since, we would go and plant trees every year, and it rained every time. This made the survival rate stay above 85 percent even till now."

While Green Life started off with the intention of planting trees, it soon grew into a much larger project that raises awareness about the land degradation that is converting China's grasslands into barren stretches of wasteland. "In the beginning, I did this charity as a mother who wanted to realize her son's dream," Yi told CNN.

"But later I realised that China has a really serious desertification problem. If the situation keeps getting worse, how can 1.3 billion Chinese people possibly survive? So we felt a sense of

social responsibility."

When the initial funds ran out, the biggest challenge that Yi and her husband faced was that of raising more money. They ended up investing their life savings in the project, and even sold their two houses to keep it going.

Prof Rashid

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told The Daily Star.

The physician left behind his wife Dr Quamrun Nahar, daughter Rashida Ahmad, a teacher at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, and son Rezan Ahmad, a psychotherapist in Bristol, England.

The first namaz-e-janaja of Prof Rashiduddin will be held today at his former workplace, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), at 10:00am.

From there, his body will be taken to his village home in Belabo of Narsingdi where he will be buried after Zohr prayers following another namaz-e-janaja, said Alasdair.

Rashiduddin was born in Cox's Bazar on January 3, 1939. After completing MBBS in Dhaka, he went to the UK for further studies.

Returning to the country in 1970, he started the first ever neurosurgical services of the then East Pakistan at the Institute of Postgraduate Medical Research, present day BSMMU.

Widely known as Prof Rashid, he became the founder president of Bangladesh Society of Neurosurgeons in 1998 and one of the pioneers in establishing the Institute of Neurosciences in the city's Agargaon.