

A piece of history rusting away



The salvaged MV Akram lies neglected at Shahan Shah Dockyard by Shitalakhya river in Bandar upazila of Narayanganj. The ship used to carry supplies for the Pakistan occupation forces during the Liberation War. The freedom fighters sunk the vessel by setting a mine underneath it on October 30 in 1971. The photo was taken recently.

SANAD SAHA with HASAN MEER

They were waiting for the sun to set.

Once the evening spread out against the sky, the group slowly but surely headed toward their destination -- London Ghat in Dakatia river near Chandpur river port.

Soon, the moon sunk beneath a black cloud, and the night became darker and quieter than ever. Maybe a murmur here and there.

But the group did not pay any heed. They had a mission to complete.

It was October. The 30th to be exact. The year - 1971.

And their mission was to sink MV Akram, a ship that carried supplies including food and weapons for the Pakistan occupation army.

The ship used to guard the Padma estuary. On information that it would be docked at London Ghat, the group undertook the mission.

On that night, the freedom fighters set up a mine underneath the ship and were able to sink it, and thus denying the occupying army the resources they needed.

Then after independence, the ship went under the ownership of Bangladesh Shilpa Bank.

Many years went by, it changed many hands and many attempts were made to lift it from the bottom of the river, but to no avail. Eventually, the ship including the history of courage and patriotism just sank into oblivion.

Then in 2007, it was purchased by some Narayanganj sand traders. In November, 2008, after much effort they were able to lift it from the bottom of the river. The owners brought it to Shahan Shah Dockyard by Shitalakhya river in Bandar upazila of Narayanganj.

After finding out about the ship's history, freedom fighters demanded its preservation and the liberation war affairs ministry in August 2009 decided to preserve it.

But nine years went by; the ship remained at the dock, neglected.

Finally this year, after continuous demand from the freedom fighters and civil society members, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has started the process of

preserving MV Akram.

It will soon be taken to Karnaphuli Dockyard, around 3km from the Shahan Shah Dockyard, for renovation, according to BIWTA. Once renovated, MV Akram will be taken to the Military Museum in the capital. It will be preserved and displayed as a Liberation War memorabilia there.

Built in Holland in 1965, the ship was owned by United Trading Corporation and Industrial Bank of Pakistan. It was around 180-foot long and weighed around 688 metric tonnes, said Kazi Nasir, deputy commander of Bandar Upazila Freedom Fighters' Council.

Risking their lives, the naval commandos led by Momin Ullah Patwary Bir Pratik that night successfully sunk the ship, he added. "But due to negligence of the authorities concerned, an important evidence of our history is lying neglected. It should be preserved at once."

During a visit this week, the newspaper saw that the half-sunk rusty ship was at the dock owned by one Shahan Shah.

Many of the locals alleged that over the years some unscrupulous persons had stolen parts of the ship and sold those.

Sand trader Moktar Hossain, one of the owners of the ship, alleged that two persons had cut parts of the ship on June 29 this year. He said he lodged a complaint with Bandar Police Station on July 5.

"We bought the ship for Tk 14 lakh from a businessman after he failed to lift it from the river. He bought it at an auction held by the bank. It took us almost a year to lift it. Then we had to spend additional money to bring it to Narayanganj."

He said they were hoping to make a profit by selling it. "But for the last nine years we could not do so and it's just lying here," he said and demanded that they get compensated for their losses.

"We had been pursuing the ministry and BIWTA for compensation, but to no avail," he alleged. In the meantime, local influential people had stolen almost one third of the ship including its engine, oil tank, wheel and plates,

he alleged.

The dockyard owner, Shahan Shah, said he was also incurring losses. "No ship can pass through the spot as MV Akram is occupying the space. This ship is an important part of history. The government should not just leave it like this."

Another owner of the ship, Sanwar Hossain, said, "We want the government to preserve the ship. But at the same time, we want compensation too."

When asked, Abul Kalam, officer-in-charge of Narayanganj Bandar Police Station, said they have been guarding the ship so that no one could steal its parts. "We are also trying to recover the stolen parts and arrest the perpetrators."

Dhiman Saha, general secretary of Shushashoner Jannoy Nagorik (SHUJAN), Narayanganj chapter, said, "The ship must be preserved. It bears testimony to the glorious chapter in the country's history."

Abdur Rahman, general secretary of Narayanganj Nagarik Committee, and Mahbubur Rahman Masum, president of Narayanganj Press Club, echoed him.

Contacted, Gulzar Ali, BIWTA joint director (Narayanganj River Port), said, "We have already pumped out most of the water from inside the ship and cleaned the garbage. It will be taken to the Karnaphuli Dockyard soon for renovation."

Regarding the compensation, he said, "They [the owners] had sent a letter to our head office. We have forwarded it to the shipping ministry. They will take a decision soon..."

Contacted, Rabbi Miah, deputy commissioner of Narayanganj, said, "As per direction of the shipping ministry, the ship will be taken to the Military Museum from the Karnaphuli Dockyard after renovation. It will be preserved and displayed there as a Liberation War memorabilia."

He also added, "Regarding the expenditure of transporting the ship as well as compensating the owners, the ministries concerned [Shipping and Liberation War ministries] are in talks. The issue will be finalised soon."

RU student 'abducted' by ex-husband'

Students demonstrate for her return

RU CORRESPONDENT

A female student of Rajshahi University was allegedly abducted by her former husband from the university campus yesterday morning.

Shohel Rana, of Naogaon, was waiting for the fourth-year Bangla student in front of Taposhi Rabeya Hall, where she used to reside.

When she was going to sit for her fourth-year final examination around 9:00am, he tried to talk to her, and soon the two were locked into an altercation.

Later, Shohel forced her into a microbus and went away, said witnesses.

According to the family of the student, she got married to Shohel in December last year,

but they got divorced two months back.

Talking to The Daily Star, the student's father said, "I have talked to my daughter at 7:20am in the morning for the last time. Later, around 8:25am, I got a call from my daughter's friend, who informed me about her kidnapping."

"Then I informed my relatives in Rajshahi," he added.

Meanwhile, around 4:00pm, more than 300 students started a demonstration and staged a sit-in in front of the vice chancellor's residence. They gave a two-hour ultimatum to the authorities to bring her back.

One of the protestors said, "A student

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Tea party at DU!

DU CORRESPONDENT

It was around two in the morning.

The area was still abuzz with activities. Divided into groups, many were singing, chanting or just gossiping.

But they all had one thing in common -- all were drinking tea. After all the name of the party was "Tea Party after 8:00pm at TSC".

It was held at the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) on the Dhaka University campus. Some of the students of the university arranged it as a protest against the administration's "decision" to close the tea stalls around the TSC area by 8:00pm. Though the symbolic protest started after midnight and continued till 3:00am, many current and former students started to gather there around 8:00pm.

"Dhaka University has always been the place for progressive cultural activities," said a student of the law department. "The administration cannot bar this cultural practice by giving the excuse of security."

Echoing him, a student of the music department, said, "We cannot allow this kind of restriction on free movement."

When asked, a tea seller in the area said, "We are very happy that the students stood up for us."

On October 17, the DU authorities asked all the TSC-based

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2 doctors held for death due to 'wrong treatment'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Four persons including two doctors of SMK Hospital in Chandraganj of Laxmipur upazila were detained by police yesterday over death of a patient due to alleged wrong treatment.

The doctors are gynaecologist Kazi Fayeza Akhtar and Golam Mainuddin. The other two are Alamgir and Rahim Mia. Patient's brother Ismail Hossain said his sister, Fatema Begum, 45, was undergoing surgery yesterday to remove a

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Chief Information Commissioner Prof Golam Rahman looks at a photograph at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy yesterday. A total of 67 photographs on Rohingya crisis taken by eight staff photographers of the Prothom Alo were displayed as part of a weeklong exhibition titled "Refugee: Supplanted Rohingya". The photographs will also be sold and the money generated will be spent for rehabilitation of the refugees. The photographers are Ashrafur Alam, Sabina Yesmin, Saiful Islam, Abdus Salam, Sumon Yusuf, Surov Dash, Jewel Sheel and Teknaf correspondent of the daily, Gias Uddin.

PHOTO: STAR

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RMG workers stage demo in Mirpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of garment workers blocked a road in the capital's Mirpur area for around four hours yesterday fearing that they might lose their jobs as "the factory is being relocated without any prior notice".

Around 500 workers of Trust Trouser Limited demonstrated blocking the road in Mirpur-12 bus stand area since 9:00am, said Dadon Fakir, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station. "They also vandalised a few vehicles..." he added.

Many of the workers alleged that the management decided to shift the factory to Mohammadpur without notifying them beforehand. When they went to work yesterday, they found that the factory was closed.

They alleged that some of the machineries have already been shifted.

There are around 1,800 workers, and most of them live in Mirpur, said one of the workers.

The OC said the blockade was withdrawn following an assurance from the local lawmaker of considering their demands, which include -- three months salary, one basic and two festival bonuses per year.

The factory management could not be reached for comments.

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