

Eight killed in three road accidents

STAR REPORT

At least eight people, including three children, died in separate road accidents in Chandpur, Laxmipur and Dhaka yesterday.

In Chandpur's Shahrasti upazila, a speeding CNG-run auto-rickshaw collided head-on with a bus yesterday morning. Six people, who were all passengers of the auto-rickshaw, were killed.

The dead were identified as: Moni Begum, 28, her son Rumman Hossain, 8, Abul Kalam, 62, Ranjit Chandra, 52, Md Shahjahan, 62, and Fakhrul Islam, 75.

Officer-In-Charge (OC) of Shahrasti Police Station Md Shah Alam said the incident took place around 9:15am when a Gazipur-bound Cordova Paribahan bus collided head-on with the auto-rickshaw near Kakoirtola Bazar area on the Chandpur-Cumilla road.

Four of the passengers died on the spot, one died on the way to hospital and another at Cumilla Medical College Hospital, the OC said.

Swapan, the driver of the CNG auto-rickshaw, was in critical condition and undergo-ing treatment at the hospital, he added.

According to witnesses, the CNG-run auto-rickshaw, after picking up the six pas-sengers from Kachua's Jagotpur area, was moving with excessive speed and over-took four to five vehicles before it collided head-on with the bus.

Agitating locals barricaded the Chandpur-Cumilla regional highway and vandalised some vehicles.

However, police took control after around two hours and removed the barricade, af-ter which vehicular movement went back to normal.

Jihadul Kabir, superintendent of Chandpur police, said legal action would be taken after investigating the cause of the accident.

Meanwhile in Laxmipur, a madrasa student was run over by a speeding pickup van while he was crossing a road in Shakchar area on his way to school around 10:00am.

The dead was identified as Md Yasin Hossain, 9, student of Hamid Miaji Madrasa.

He was taken to Laxmipur General Hospital in critical condition, where doctors de-clared him dead.

Blocking the road with logs, locals staged a protest against the accident for an hour.

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Fishermen and fish traders bring out a trawler procession on Khakdhon river in Barguna yesterday demanding cancellation of the 65-day ban on hilsa netting.

PHOTO: STAR

3 RSO men linked to Burdwan blast jailed

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced three Myanmar nationals to 10 years in jail for their involvement in planning subversive activities in Bangladesh.

The convicts are Md Nur Hossain alias Rafiqul Islam, 30, Yasir Arafat, 26, and Omar Karim, 29. Of them, Omar is still at large.

According to court documents, all of them were members of Myanmar-based militant outfit Rohingya Solidarity Organisation.

Judge Md Rabiul Alam of the Special Tribunal-4 handed down the sentence under Explosive Substances Act in presence of the two accused.

The tribunal fined them Tk 10,000 each, in default of which they will have to serve ad-ditional six months in jail.

The punishment of the fugitive will be effective from the day of their arrest, the judge said in his judgment.

According to the case statement, a team of detectives arrested Nur and Yasir with ex-plosives from Sir Salimullah Muslim Orphanage Road in the capital's Lalbagh on No-venber 30, 2014. Four other militants, including Omar managed to flee from the place of occurrence.

The convicts had links to a blast took place in a rented house in Burdwan town of Kol-kata on October 2, 2014.

Moreover, they had been planning to conduct subversive activities in Bangladesh with the help of international Islamic militant organisations.

On March 3, 2015, investigation officer of the case SI Md Abdul Kader Miah submitted a charge sheet accusing the three.

Beyond belief

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"Police filed this case when I was in jail. They say I fled the scene leaving a machete. How could anyone do that when he is already in jail?" Rahi told The Daily Star recently.

"The case was filed to harass me, nothing else," he said.

SI Apurba, the complainant of the case, said he made Rahi an accused because eyewitnesses gave his name.

"The investigating officer can drop the name of any accused if he does not find evidence against him during investigations," he said.

Contacted, investigating officer Arif said he would not make any comment on the matter.

"Talk to my officer-in-charge or senior officials," he said.

Pressed further, he said he was under no obligation to talk to journalists and answer their questions.

"I'm accountable only to my senior officers," he said.

But the then OC Jamal Uddin Mir, now posted in Kadamtoli Police Station, squarely blamed Arif.

"I am not responsible for this. It was the duty of the investigating officer to probe the matter properly. It was his duty to find out who was in jail at the time or not," he said.

Contacted last night, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner (Tejgaon division) Biplob Kumar Sarker said he could not make any comment without seeing the case documents.

Tears, troops on Lankan streets

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it," the cardinal said at his official residence, where President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe were among the small congregation.

"We pray that in this country there will be peace and co-existence and understanding each other without division," he said.

"What happened last Sunday is a great tragedy, an insult to humanity," he added.

STUCK IN TIME

At exactly 8:45 am, the singing of hymns by scores of people outside St Anthony's church stopped and the bells tolled. The hands on the tower clock are still fixed at the time of the blast.

"I come to this church every Sunday, it feels like my second home," said Dharshika Fernando, 19, fighting back tears.

"It feels like people blasted my own home."

Thousands of Sri Lankan troops remained on the streets, guarding churches and mosques for the symbolic day.

Security forces also carried out new arrests, a day after at least 15 people were killed in a raid on a jihadist hideout where suicide bombers blew

themselves up.

Police said they arrested two top suspects in connection with the Easter bombings in central Nawalapitiya on Saturday night, taking the total number in detention to more than 100.

Authorities say they are seeking about 140 Islamic State influenced radicals in all.

The latest two, Mohamed Saadik Abdul Haq and Mohamed Saahid Abdul Haq, were on a list of six "most wanted" radicals issued on Thursday.

They were wanted for the December 26 desecration of Buddha statues at the central town of Mawanella, the act that first brought to prominence the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ) group, which has been blamed for the Easter bombings.

SCHOOLS STAY CLOSED

The previous night, three men set off explosives killing themselves, three women and six children after a showdown with security forces near the eastern town of Kalmunai.

Police said three other suspected suicide bombers were shot dead by security forces outside the hideout. A civilian was also killed in crossfire.

The Islamic State group, which claimed responsibility for the Easter bombings, said the three men who

blew themselves up at Kalmunai were members of the militant group.

Kalmunai is in the same region as the hometown of the jihadist Zahran Hashim, who founded the NTJ group.

Police said the widow of Hashim and their child were wounded in the Kalmunai raid.

"The woman and her four-year-old daughter are now being treated at a government hospital," police spokesman Ruwan Gunasekera told AFP.

Gunasekera said they were carrying out DNA tests to establish if Hashim's father was among those who perished at the safe house.

Another raid in the region targeted a house where authorities said Hashim and the other suicide bombers filmed a pledge of allegiance to IS before staging their attacks.

The video was shown by IS when it made its claim of responsibility.

Footage shown on state television showed explosives, a generator, a drone and a large quantity of batteries inside the converted studio. An IS flag and uniforms were also found, police said.

The firebrand cleric is said to have died in the attack on the Shangri-La, one of three Colombo hotels hit by suicide bombers.

\$2b laundered for buying work visas

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A section of government officials are also involved in the informal syndicate, he added.

"We won't get the benefit of migration if we can't break the syndicate," Iftekharuzzaman said, adding: "Unfortunately, we talk of the remittance we get but not the money being laundered out of the country."

According to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), around one crore Bangladeshis work abroad, mostly in the Mid-dle East and Southeast Asian countries and send home around 15 bil-lion dollars annually.

The yearly average labour migration from Bangladesh is seven lakh.

High cost of migration, however, has been a major concern for long but authorities are unable to control it. As per the G-to-G Plus deal with Ma-laysia in early 2016, migration cost was fixed at Tk 40,000, but later it rose to Tk 4 lakh in the informal, illegal channels.

According to insiders in the recruitment industries, a good portion of the money used to buy visas was given to several layers of informal brokers are involved in the process.

"The situation will not improve if we cannot bring the informal brokers under a legal framework," Iftekharuzzaman said.

This malpractice, which partly accounts for many times higher cost for Bangladeshi migrant workers

compared to most other sending countries, will continue unless the government undertakes effective negotiations on equal footing with the relevant countries, he added.

Iftekharuzzaman said migration was a two-way street, which meant that it was not only Bangladesh that could benefit from migration, but also the countries that recruited Bangladeshi workers.

"Therefore, there is no reason for us to be subservient to the destination countries while we negotiate."

RMMRU Chair Prof Tasneem Siddiqui said overseas labour recruitment was almost impossible without brokers. Therefore, informal brokers should be brought under a legal framework so that they can be held ac-countable.

Centre for Policy Dialogue Distinguished Fellow Dr Mustafizur Rahman said many of the migrants had to take loans at high interest rates -- as high as 120 percent. "In such cases, migration cannot be beneficial."

He said 11 of the 17 goals set in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be achieved if migrants were protected.

"We need to reduce migration cost, as well as the cost of remittance transfer. The SDG goal is to reduce remittance transfer cost to 3 percent. In Bangladesh it is below 5 percent," Mustafizur Rahman said.

Economist Dr Hossain Zillur

Rahman, adviser to a former caretaker gov-ernment, said it was regretful that there was more interest in the remittance generated than the humane aspects of the migrants who toil abroad far from their families.

"Why can't we give a better treatment to the migrants at the airport?" he said, adding that some migrants return home come with certain skills and authorities should think how those can be better utilised.

At a separate session, Manusher Jonno Foundation Executive Director Shaheen Anam said migration was a win-win situation when migrants are safe and get fair pay. The government, NGOs and recruiting agen-cies all need to work in unison for migrants' protection.

At the earlier panel discussion, Shirin Lira, gender and social inclusion adviser of PROKAS, an NGO, said there were many cases of women migrants who are allegedly exploited abroad, but there remained a seri-ous lack of justice.

"They neither get justice abroad nor after returning home," she said.

Parliamentary Caucus on Migration Chair Israfil Alam, MP, BMET Direc-tor General Salim Reza, International Centre for Climate Change and Development Director Dr Saleemul Huq, WARBE Development Founda-tion Chairman Syed Saiful Haque also spoke on the occasion.

Situation still grim

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2017, it adds.

During its study, the rights body analysed reports of dailies Prothom Alo, Jugantar, Samakal, Ittefaq, New Age and The Daily Star.

Some reasons for child murders that the newspapers reported were family dispute, wealth, refusal in relationship, illicit relationship, protest, failed rape attempt, and refusing to give extortion money.

Addressing the press conference, Prof Shahnaz Huda of the law department at Dhaka University said one of Bangladesh government's initiatives to reduce violence against children is to formulate law.

However, law formulation is not sufficient to reduce violence against children despite having provisions like death sentence in a rape case, she said.

One of the aims of establishing laws is to deter perpetrators from repeating same offense, she said.

"However, this is not happening in our country because of the 'culture of immunity' in most cases, when the perpetrator knows he or she will get away with economic or political influence," she added.

The MJF report says 345 news reports cited 356 child rape victims last year. Of them, 22 died.

In previous year, the number of such reports was 456 and victims were 472, it adds.

In cases of attempted rape, 53 reports were published about the same number of victims. In previous year, 41 such reports about 45 victims.

The report also says the highest number of children -- 412 -- was killed and 133 more injured in road accidents last year.

Whereas, 364 reports on road accidents had 452 child victims in 2017, it says.

In 2018, the newspapers published 56 stories on sexual violence against children citing 77 victims. One of them died.

In 2017, news reports on similar issues were 81 and affected children were 101.

Some 88 reports mentioned 98 child victims of kidnapping incidents last year. Of them, 19 were killed.

On the other hand, such reports in 2017 were 69 and the victims were 72, says the report.

In cases of child marriage, last year 11 news reports were published citing 177 victims all over the country, it says.

In 2017, media reports on child marriage were 36 which cited 525 victims, it adds.

In 2018, 38 children became victims of trafficking and 22 news reports were published in this regard, whereas such news reports were 10 and the victims were 80 in 2017, the report mentions.

Three children became victims of

political violence last year and two of them were killed. Two news reports were published to this end.

Five such reports were published in 2017 that cited 54 victims. Two of them were killed.

Last year, 156 news reports cited death by suicide of 152 children whereas 203 news reports cited death by suicide of the same number of children in 2017, the MJF report says.

There were five news reports on six acid victims last year.

One alarming finding by MJF was that last year 70 children were physically tortured and 17 were raped by their teachers.

The situation of the country's children was not improving despite various initiatives by both government and non-government organisations were in place, said MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam.

One reason might be that the number of children was increasing. It could also be, violence was increasing in the society, she said.

She said legal procedure should be strengthened so that the victims get justice.

Besides, guardians, parents, teachers and educational institutions have to be more aware to protect their children, she added.

Rony Chakma, senior assistant secretary of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, said the ministry was working to reduce violence against children.

UK campaigners gear up for EU vote in shadow of Brexit

AFP, London

With Brexit passions running high, campaigners are hitting Britain's streets and taking to social media ahead of European elections.

Political parties old and new are gearing up for what has been described as a "zombie" election that was never meant to be held until Britain delayed its scheduled departure from the European Union.

The vote could now become a poll on Brexit -- three years on from a referendum in which 52 percent voted to leave the bloc.

"I see it as a soft referendum," said Isis Queresma-Cabral, 44, a French citizen in Britain for 19 years and a pro-EU election activist.

"(It's) an opportunity for us European citizens who felt hurt by the first referendum to voice that," she said.

Brexiters are similarly minded, with social worker Richard Harris, 37, joining anti-EU firebrand Nigel Farage's new Brexit Party.

police asked them to install security instruments at every entry point and check eve-ry devotee before entry, they added.

Earlier on April 24, Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary directed all units of police to beef up security and intelligence surveillance to prevent any untoward incident ahead of the upcoming May Day, Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr.

Javed came up with the directive in a meeting through a video confer-ence with the chiefs of all police units and police high officials at the Police Headquarters.

Ensure high security

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week to create awareness among people."

On the first day of the week, a high official meeting was held at the DMP headquarters under the presidency of its commissioner Asaduz-zaman Miah, which was attended by the deputy commissioners of dif-ferent zones, detective branches and counterterrorism.

A high official of the DMP, present in the closed-door meeting, told The Daily Star that they discussed the increase of security at national mosques, churches and temples along with covering major areas with

the use of Close Circuit Television Camera (CCTV) surveillance.

"We also asked to bring the cinema halls, theatres, five star residential hotels and airports under tougher surveillance," the official said, re-questing anonymity.

Although, the KPI remains under tough security vigil, the officials have still instructed keeping a close eye on them, the official added.

Police already prepared a roster for bomb disposal units and first-response teams so that they can deal with any kind of situation at any time, sources in the meeting said.

Police further instructed bit-police

officials to hold regular meetings in the community, especially in English medium schools, colleges, uni-versities and madrasas.

They were also asked to update the tenant databases after visiting dif-ferent houses randomly, sources added.

Following the meeting, all DMP crime divisions and the detective branch set up two-hour long check posts at all major points of the cap-ital from 2:00pm to 4:00pm yesterday.

"We will also conduct block raids and special drives as part of the check posts during the mass

awareness week," said a deputy com-missioner of DMP crime division.

Police also held a meeting with the owners of residential hotels and religious institutions in different areas of the capital.

In the meeting with hotel owners, police officials asked them to check every guest through metal detectors and archways very carefully. They were also asked to check every hotel staff members' identity cards and addresses and were advised to take police help if needed, DMP officials said.

During the meeting with religious institutions' authorities,