

Three drown in Kishoreganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Three people, including a woman and her son, drowned as an engine-run boat sank in the Sinai river in Kishoreganj's Itna upazila yesterday.

The dead are Yesmin Akter, 30, and her child Yeasin Mia, 7, of Shimla Uttarpara village; and Asiya Khatun, 60, wife of Jobber Hossain of Gandoppur Purbapara in Itna.

Quoting locals, Itna Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad

Morshed Zaman said the small boat, carrying 25 passengers and bamboos, went down around 4:00pm when it was about to reach the banks of the river in Borshikura Bazarghat area.

The boat was overloaded and it was taking the bamboos to Dhara village in the upazila, he said.

Most of the passengers, except the victims, managed to swim ashore, he said.

The bodies were handed over to the family members, the OC added.

Afghans cruise to easy win

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total of 197 for five. In reply, Zimbabwe reached 168 for seven in the 20 allotted overs.

Regis Chakabva fought a lone battle from one end, top-scoring with an unbeaten 42. Skipper Brendon Taylor's 27 was the second-highest score as Zimbabwe lost wickets at regular intervals.

Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan was once again instrumental with his leg-spin and picked up two wickets, as did Fareed Malik.

The win continued Afghanistan's dominance in the shortest format of the game, extending their winning run to 12 consecutive games. It was also their eighth successive win against Zimbabwe.

Earlier, Najibullah and Mohammad Nabi crushed the Zimbabwe bowlers. The duo combined for seven consecutive sixes in the latter part of the innings as Afghanistan added 88 runs in the last five overs.

It was Nabi who initiated the

carnage, smiting four consecutive sixes off pacer Tendai Chatara in the 17th over. Najibullah added another three straight sixes to start the next over from Neville Madziva. In total, Afghanistan blasted 15 sixes, taking the record for most sixes by a team in a T20I innings in Mirpur.

Nabi was dismissed after a quickfire 18-ball 38, but Najibullah went on to register a 22-ball fifty and remained not out for a 30-ball 69, a knock that featured five fours and six sixes.

Afghanistan made a flying start as debutant opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz scored 43 off just 24 balls to lay the platform for a big total. However, Zimbabwe managed to make a comeback in the game and scalped three quick wickets, removing Hazratullah Zazai (13), Najeeb Tarakai (14) and Asghar Afghan (14), to reduce Afghanistan to 90 for 4 inside 14 overs.

Chatara and Sean Williams bagged two wickets each for Zimbabwe but remained on the expensive side.

Nothing done

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The project aims to develop collaborative forest management and increase opportunities for alternative income for the people who are dependent on forests for their livelihood, according to project documents.

Under the project, trees will be planted in 76,000 hectares of land in 600 villages. The project seeks to improve the lives of 40,000 people.

At yesterday's meeting, the House committee members expressed dismay when project officials could not speak of any significant progress although they already spent Tk 57 crore, meeting sources said.

"The progress of the project is far from our expectation," Saber told reporters.

Also interestingly, the forest and environment ministry scrapped the Project Evaluation Committee (PEC).

But the ministry officials could not explain why it was done when the parliament committee members sought to know it.

"We have asked the ministry to give an explanation in the next meeting," Saber said.

The PEC has been scrapped as a top official of the ministry wants his brother at its helm, sources said.

Contacted, Project Director Zahir Uddin Ahmed said they bought five cars for Tk 2.5 crore and rented

another five cars for Tk 2.5 lakh each per month.

Asked about the delay in starting the project work, he said, "It has now started."

About the foreign trips by project officials, he said, "Those were study tours. They went there to learn. I cannot say anything more."

DNCC TO FACE MUSIC

The committee also asked the environment ministry to penalise Dhaka North City Corporation with a fine for dumping garbage in Aminbazar without environmental clearance.

"The Dhaka North City Corporation is dumping waste and garbage at the landfill in Aminbazar without the requisite environmental clearance from the Department of Environment. By doing this, the city corporation is polluting environment. So we asked the ministry to impose fine on the city corporation," said Sabar.

"What the Dhaka North City Corporation is doing is totally illegal. The Department of Environment earlier sent a letter to the city corporation to refrain from dumping waste in that area but they paid no heed. We have asked the ministry to serve a notice calling for the closure of the landfill," he added.

The waste station in Aminbazar was built on 50 acres of land in 2005-2006.

13-year-old girl killed

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7:00am, but did not return on her usual time, said Saroj Kumar, officer-in-charge of Pirganj Police Station.

Later, family members and villagers recovered her body from a bush about 500 meter away from their house around 10:30am, the OC said.

Talking to journalists, the victim's grandfather said she might have been murdered after rape when she was returning home.

Police, however, found no evidence of rape in their primary investigation.

The body was sent to Rangpur Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

The victim's father, who was on his way to Rangpur from Dhaka till filing the report around 6:30pm last evening, would file a case after arriving in Rangpur, said her family members.

Meanwhile in Bogura, a ten-year-old female madrasa student was allegedly raped by an office assistant of the madrasa yesterday.

The accused Alamgir Hossain Bablu, 45 is from Thalta Majhgram village of Bogura's Nandigram upazila.

Alamgir stopped the girl around 10:30am when she was on her way to a local community clinic and took her to his home to rape her, said Shakhwat Kabir, OC of Nandigram Police Station.

Hearing the girl screaming, locals rushed to Bablu's home and rescued her, the OC said, adding that the locals also caught the perpetrator and later handed him over to police.

During primary investigation, Bablu admitted that he had raped the girl, the OC also said.

In Bandarban, a man was sued yesterday on charge of raping a tenth-grader in Lama upazila on Friday.

The accused, Amir Hossain, 25, is a resident of Noapara area in the upazila.

morning when she went out for toilet. Talking to The Daily Star, one of the victim's family members alleged that police delayed in recording the case due to the interference of local Ward Councillor Md Hossen Badsha.

Oppela Raju Naha, OC of Lama Police Station, however, denied such allegation.

Contacted, Badsha said they had tried to solve the matter through arbitration.

In Savar, police yesterday arrested the prime accused in a case filed over gang-raping a woman in Dhaka's Dhamrai upazila on Monday.

Jashim, 26, from Tangail's Nagarpur upazila, was arrested from his village home.

Our Rangpur, Bogura, Bandarban and Savar correspondents contributed to this report.

Top Canadian police official arrested on spying charges

AFP, Ottawa

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said on Friday that they had arrested a senior intelligence officer for allegedly stealing sensitive documents.

Cameron Ortis faces five charges under Canada's criminal code and its Security of Information Act, the federal police agency said in a statement.

"The allegations are that he obtained, stored, processed sensitive information, we believe with the intent to communicate it to people that he shouldn't be communicating it to," prosecutor John MacFarlane told journalists after Ortis appeared in court on Friday.



Speakers at a roundtable discussion on the Use and Misuse of Defamation Law and its Impact on Journalism at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. They said defamation laws were being misused, curtailing the freedom of expression and press. PHOTO: STAR

Misuse curbing press freedom

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SC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan said the High Court, not the magistrate or sessions courts, should hold the trial proceedings of defamation cases.

He said the trial proceedings of a defamation case filed under Section 500 of the Penal Code are linked to Article 39 of the constitution, but the magistrate courts or the sessions courts do not have the jurisdiction to opine on or interpret the article. Only the HC can do that, he said.

"So how can a judge hold the trial of a case filed under Section 500 [of the Penal Code] if he or she doesn't have the jurisdiction to explain the article?" Khurshid, also the editor of Dhaka Law Reports, said.

"The responsibility of holding trial of defamation cases need to be given to the original jurisdiction. It means a constitutional court -- the High Court -- should handle the issue," he said.

Khurshid, also the chief prosecutor of the Anti-Corruption Commission, then mentioned that many on Facebook had made defamatory remarks on him following a verdict on a top opposition leader in a corruption case. He said he was in favour of considering defamation to be a criminal offence.

Advocate Manzill Murshid, president of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, said in today's digital era, there was a need for a law to protect people on the digital platforms.

Talking to The Daily Star after the programme, he said Article 39 guaranteed the freedom of speech and expression, but it was subject to "reasonable restrictions".

Under the garb of those restrictions, the state has formulated some acts, including defamation laws, digital security act, press council act and contempt of court, he said.

"Those acts are existing in the country in respect of freedom of speech, but a few years ago there were not so many allegations that laws were being misused.

"But now, we find that in many cases the authorities concerned are abusing the provisions of the defamation and other laws. It is happening because of the weaknesses in the rule of law and absence of an effective democracy."

Addressing the discussion, Prof Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University's law department said defamation act was a much-talked-about issue all over the world.

Freedom of many media outlets, including print and online platforms,

as well as citizen journalism received blows as cases were filed under the defamation laws, he said.

He said defamation should be considered a civil offence in Bangladesh as this would reduce chances of harassment by police and government prosecutors and also help people defend themselves.

Asif added defamation laws were being used to suppress different opinions.

SC lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said there was a need for re-examining the issue of "reasonable restrictions" imposed on freedom of speech in article 39.

The article says, "Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed. Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence -- (a) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression; and (b) freedom of the press, are guaranteed."

Jyotirmoy said, "I have serious doubt whether the restrictions mentioned in article 39 are really reasonable restrictions. I really want to examine those. It's because these restrictions are the basis of all subsequent repressive laws."

Due to these constitutional restrictions, he said, lawmakers get constitutional mandate to enact "repressive laws". Until these restrictions will be eliminated, more repressive laws will come, he said, adding that the law-making process cannot be challenged before court due to relevant constitutional restrictions.

Referring to the existing laws that deal with defamation cases, he said, "The act leads itself to misuse because it is vague and subject to various interpretations."

Syed Ishtiaque Reza, chief editor of GTV and Sarabangla news portal, said one of the major concerns these days was defamation cases were being filed by third parties. He said local journalists were the main victims and that they lack necessary legal support.

He said the journalists' union is sharply divided on political lines and they cannot take a firm stance even for something like freedom of the press. "Good journalism is possible if we can stand united at least over issues like press freedom," he said.

"Self-censorship has reached such a level that we know when and where

we must stop," he said, adding that journalists have to think twice before writing anything against anyone.

Mizanur Rahman Khan, joint editor of Bangla daily Prothom Alo, suggested building a consensus among the stakeholders to decriminalise defamation since the UN Human Rights Committee and other international bodies have recommended it.

"We [however] are witnessing harsher punishment in DSA [Digital Security Act] at a time when the committee clearly suggested avoiding excessively punitive measures and penalties," he said in his written speech.

He said while the Indian law commission favours decriminalisation of defamation, the Bangladesh Law Commission in 2007 refused to consider a request from the then caretaker government to decriminalise defamation.

Stressing the need for independent judiciary, he said, "If we want press freedom, independence of judiciary is a must."

SC lawyer Qazi Zahed Iqbal said a proper explanation of the term "aggrieved person" is absent in defamation laws and this needs to be addressed.

This would help reducing filing of "unnecessary cases", he observed.

Defamation laws are draconian because there are scopes to misuse the acts, he said, adding that a change in people's mindset is also required to stop such misuse.

SC lawyer Barrister Aneek R Haque said an act of defamation should not be considered criminal offense under any circumstance. It should rather be taken as a civil offence.

He pointed out that many web portals were "acting in a strange way" in the name of journalism. He said necessary steps should have been taken to hold them accountable.

Without taking any name, SC lawyer Aynun Nahar Siddika said there are many laws which are now well in force in the country.

"However, we should see how acceptable these laws are," she said.

SM Shamim Reza, associate professor of DU's mass communication and journalism, said the space for freedom of expression in Bangladesh is shrinking and this is true not only for the press, but also for art and culture.

Sarkar Barbaq Quarmal, assistant professor at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, said many media houses,

including those widely trusted by the people, had to exercise "self-censorship" due to enactment of certain laws.

They had to restrain themselves from publishing certain reports, including those on corruption and investigative reports, he said.

He cautioned against too much self-censorship saying that people might lose their faith in journalism if media outlets fail to report facts.

Faruq Faisal, South Asia regional director of rights organisation Article 19, recommended that the age-old Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act-1973 should be amended.

Saleem Samad, representative of Reporters Without Borders in Bangladesh, said representatives of different international organisations, which are working in the country for media freedom, have recently sat together to build a network.

For them, a major issue was to press the authorities to decriminalise defamation, he said.

Khairuzzaman Kamal, secretary general of Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum, said apart from launching legal battle, civil society members, journalists and lawyers have to work on a common platform to push forward issues of freedom of expression and press freedom.

Syed Ahamed of Front Line Defenders said laws are supposed to uphold people's rights.

However, new laws were formulated and those curtailed people's rights, he said.

While moderating the programme, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said there is a need for a defamation law in every society to protect people's reputation and dignity, but how the law is being enforced is very important.

"We are observing that people's freedom of expression is being curtailed when the defamation act is being misused, and the defamation law is almost becoming like a new avenue of repressing the press," he said.

This is happening not only in Bangladesh, but also in other countries, he said. "Governments are intensifying control over freedom of speech and press by using defamation laws."

At the beginning of the programme, a powerpoint presentation was demonstrated by the "Law and Our Rights" desk of The Daily Star.

Shovon, Rabbani removed

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colleagues that she has decided to let the duo go. She said she does not like "excesses", sources told The Daily Star.

After the meeting, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader told reporters, "Chhatra League's incumbent president and general secretary have been asked to step down. But the existing committee will remain. The senior vice-president will be acting president and joint general secretary will serve as acting general secretary. They will take preparation for the next council."

Hailing from Barishal, Joy is a law graduate. Lekhak, hailing from Jashore, is an alumnus of Social Welfare and Research institute. They enrolled in Dhaka University in 2008-2009 session.

On September 9, Hasina during a joint meeting of AL's Parliamentary Board and Local Government Nomination Board, expressed annoyance over the controversial activities of Shovon and Rabbani.

Several AL leaders had alleged at the meeting that Shovon and Rabbani had given posts in Chhatra League

committees in exchange for money, they made senior AL leaders wait for them at events, and that they were drug addicts.

AL sources said Hasina became furious when Jahangirnagar University Vice-Chancellor Prof Farzana Islam recently told her that Shovon and Rabbani demanded "Four to six percent" cut from a Tk 1,445-crore project at the university.

After initially denying, Rabbani admitted to The Daily Star that they indeed demanded their "fair share" from the VC. He said they wanted the money for their "Eid expenditure".

On July 31 last year, Chhatra League leaders asked Hasina to select its president and general secretary after they failed to elect anyone in their council.

Hasina chose Shovon and Rabbani. Only on five occasions, top leaders of Chhatra League have been expelled, according to the student body's

website.

Abdur Rouf, president between 1968-1969, was expelled from the organisation. General secretary Shafiqul Alam Prodhon was expelled for his involvement in the seven-murder incident of the early 70's. Shahjahan Siraj was expelled from the general secretary post in 1971. Habibur Rahman, made president in 1988, was also expelled.



Joy



Lekhak

AL COUNCIL

The ALCWC meeting decided to hold its 21st triennial council on December 20-21. Its last council was on October 22-23.

The tenure of the AL committee would expire next month but since Hasina has the USA and India tours planned, the party decided to hold the council in December, said sources.

"My retirement time has come. I will have to go. You will have to find new leadership for the party," a central

committee member quoted her as saying.

Hasina was elected AL president in 1981 while in exile. She returned to the country on May 17, 1981.

During yesterday's discussion on the council, AL presidium member Engr Mosharrif Hossain stressed the need for completing district and upazila units' council before the national council.

However, AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury told the meeting that grassroots council was not mandatory for the national council, said sources.

At the beginning of ALCWC meeting, Hasina said they have huge responsibilities towards the country and asked party leaders and activists to discharge their responsibilities with utmost sincerity, reports UNB.

"We've taken short-, mid- and long-term plans... we've taken farsighted plans. For this, we've huge responsibilities towards the country. All the leaders and activists of Awami League will have to remember this and discharge their responsibilities in that way," she said.