

Wedding celebration turns into tragedy

Girl drowns; 23 including bride missing as two boats sink in the Padma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A five-year-old girl drowned and 23 other people went missing when two engine boats carrying a bridal party sank in the Padma in Rajshahi city's Sreerampur area yesterday evening.

Bride was among the missing.

Divers of Rajshahi Fire Service and Civil Defence and Border Guard Bangladesh were jointly conducting the search for the missing till filing of this report at 12:30am today.

A specialised rescue team of BIWTA was due to reach Rajshahi by 3:00am and it would join the search at dawn, said Abdur Rashid, additional director of Rajshahi fire service.

The victim, Morium, daughter of Ratan Ali of Basua area, was declared dead after being taken to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, said Inspector Mehedi Hassan, in-charge of river police outpost of Rajshahi.

The girl was among the 14

persons who were rescued by locals immediately after the accident took place, he said.

Five of the rescued, including groom Asaduzzaman Rumon, were hospitalised.

The two boats, carrying around 38 passengers, sank around 7:00pm shortly after three engine boats carrying the relatives of the couple started from Sreerampur ghat from Char Khanpur in Paba upazila, said police.

The boat carrying the bride and groom started to sink due to sudden strong wind in the river, sources said quoting survivors.

When the other boat went close to the sinking boat, passengers of the sinking boat jumped on that boat and it became overloaded and sank, they said.

Asaduzzaman was going to his in-law's house with his wife Sweety Khatun Nupur after a wedding reception at his home in Char Khanpur.

deaths reached 12.

More than 180 people are infected in the US. But President Donald Trump has downplayed the risk, saying the WHO's report of a 3.4 percent mortality rate was "false".

Admiral Brett Giroir, the assistant secretary of health, estimated the death rate at "somewhere between 0.1 percent and one percent" -- closer to the seasonal flu -- due to a high number of unreported cases.

A helicopter dropped test kits on the deck of the Grand Princess cruise ship off the coast of San Francisco to determine if any of the nearly 3,500 guests and crew had contracted the new coronavirus.

Health officials sounded the alarm after two passengers who had been on board during a previous voyage later fell ill, and one of them died.

The ship belongs to Princess Cruises, the company that operated a coronavirus-stricken vessel held off Japan last month from which more than 700 people tested positive and six died.

CHINA IMPORTS CASES

Cases in China have gradually fallen as tens of millions of people remain under strict quarantine to contain the virus, which first emerged in the central city of Wuhan in December.

But fresh infections increased for a second consecutive day yesterday, with 143 new patients, and the number of imported cases from abroad to 36.

China's death toll rose to 3,042, with over 80,500 infections. Other countries are facing a growing epidemic.

South Korea has the biggest number of cases outside China, with over 6,500 infections and 42 deaths, prompting the country to extend school breaks by three weeks.

Japan imposed a quarantine on arrivals from South Korea and China, angering Seoul which summoned the Japanese ambassador to protest the "irrational" move.

Italy, which has the biggest outbreak in Europe, has ordered schools and universities shut until March 15, and on Thursday reported a sharp rise in deaths, bringing the total to 148.

But the UN rights chief said yesterday that governments using lockdowns and quarantines must ensure people's rights are respected and avoid unintended consequences for their livelihoods.



This Dhaka-bound bus of Limon Paribahan veered off Dhaka-Sylhet highway and fell into the roadside ditch after it collided head-on with a microbus, heading for Sylhet, in Bhati-Kalisheema area of Brahmanbaria's Bijoynagar upazila early yesterday. The accident left six people dead and five others injured.

PHOTO: STAR

23 lives lost in a single day

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The injured were rushed to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

The youngest victim was six-year-old Khadiza Begum. She died at the hospital around 3:30pm, hours after her mother died.

Those undergoing treatment at the hospital were Rafiqul, Abul Hossain, and driver Nadim Mahmud. Of them, Abul was critically injured, officials said.

Imon's neighbour Jibon Amir of Narayanganj's Fatulla said Imon's family was from Barishal but they lived in Fatulla.

In the capital's Banani last night, Faisal Ahmed, 28, student of evening MBA at Dhaka University, was killed after a bus hit his motorcycle around 7:45pm.

The crash occurred near Setu Bhaban. Faisal was taken to Kurmitola General Hospital where he was pronounced dead, said Sub-inspector Abdul Kaiyum of Banani Police Station.

He was a resident of Pirerbagh area in Mirpur and his village home was in Pirojpur's Kaikhali upazila.

In Brahmanbaria, six people were killed after a microbus caught fire following a collision with a bus in Bijoynagar upazila of Brahmanbaria on Dhaka-Sylhet highway.

Microbus driver Shohan, 20, and

microbus passengers Rifat Mia, 19, Emon Mia, 19, Harun Mia, 40, Shakil Mia, 25, and Sagar, 22, died and Shahin, 30, Bijoy, 22, Abir, 35, and Iisan, 25, were seriously injured. They were residents of Deulbari village in Bandar upazila of Narayanganj.

The injured were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Premdhan Majumdar, sub-inspector of Khatihata Highway Police outpost, said a Dhaka-bound bus of Limon Paribahan collided with the microbus at Bhati Kalishima area around 2:30am.

Five of the victims were burnt to death on the spot and one died while being taken to a hospital. A gas cylinder of the microbus caught fire, he said.

The victims were going to Sylhet to visit Hazrat Shahjalal's shrine, he said.

The bus fell into a road-side ditch following the crash. No serious injuries among the bus passengers were reported.

Injured Iisan said he survived because he fell out of the window during the crash.

A six-kilometre tailback was created on either side of the highway. Traffic started moving after the microbus was removed from the road around 8:00am.

In Savar, constable Akash Ahammed, 22, of Narayanganj Industrial Police,

died when a truck hit his motorcycle from behind on Dhaka-Aricha highway in Ulai area around 7:00am.

Abullaloh Bakri, OC of Savar Highway Police Outpost, said Akash was going to his workplace in Narayanganj.

Police seized the truck but its driver managed to flee.

On Thursday night, Kazi Nazmul Haque Pintu, 41, of Tangail's Nagarpur upazila, got killed when a bus ran him over on Abdullahpur-Baipail road around 10:30pm.

Al Mamun Kabir, sub-inspector of Ashulia Police Station, said Nazmul died on the spot.

In Mymensingh, truck helper Abdul Azim, 22, and pick-up driver Rajon Robidas, 28, were killed when a fish-laden pickup hit a parked truck at Mehrabari around 5:30am. Two others were injured in the crash, Bhaluka Highway Police Outpost In-charge Al Mahmud Adnan said.

In Feni, Azizul Haque, 28, and Zia Uddin Bablu, 22, of Chattogram's Mirsarai, were killed after their motorbike fell from a bridge in Satbaria area, said Moin Uddin Ahmed, OC of Sonagazi Police Station.

In Cumilla, an unidentified motorcyclist died after a vehicle hit the bike from behind on Dhaka-Chattogram highway around 8:30am.

Defining moment for our freedom

FROM PAGE 1

the event.

Nirmalendu, then a trainee sub-editor of the Daily People, took a seat reserved for journalists just next to the podium with the help of Anwar Zahid, the then executive editor of The Weekly Gonobangla, a sister concern of the People.

Like the restless masses, 26-year-old Nirmalendu too was eager to hear the speech which would go on to become one of the greatest works of oration in history.

And then Bangabandhu took the stage.

Clad in a white panjabi and pyjama, with the iconic sleeveless black coat, he approached the podium around 3:15pm.

"Joy Bangla!"

The confluence of people greeted him with the same slogan.

Bangabandhu started: "Today, I appear before you with a heavy heart. You know and understand everything. We tried with our lives. But the painful matter is that today, in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur, the streets are dyed red

with the blood of our brethren. Today, the people of Bangla want freedom, the people of Bangla want their rights..."

"It was an electrifying speech," Nirmalendu, now 75, recalled in conversation with The Daily Star.

Nirmalendu recalled his memories of March 7 in his autobiography on the Liberation War titled "Atmakhata 1971".

"I had not even listened to such a spellbinding address. I will never get the scope to hear such an address in my lifetime. It was touching, it was wonderful..." he wrote in the biography.

The speech served as a muse for Nirmalendu, who went on to write one of his greatest poems "Swadhinata Ei Shobdoti Kivabe Amader Holo" [How the word independence became ours].

In his poem, he termed Bangabandhu a "poet" and his speech an "epic poem", giving descriptions of the ground, the crowd and Bangabandhu's arrival.

"And like a waterfall, his words of oration were coming out of his mouth," he wrote in his book.

An Ekushey Padak and Swadhinata

Padak winner, Nirmalendu thinks it would be unjustified if the creator of the speech with 103 verses is not recognised as a poet.

"So, I describe Bangabandhu as a poet," he wrote.

"The sea of rebellious people eagerly waiting at the Maidan since morning for him... he is a poet. When will the poet appear?" he continued.

Nirmalendu's father, Sukhendu Prokash Goon Chowdhury, an artist who was at his Mymensingh residence bedridden, was his first audience.

"After hearing my poem, my father said he can recall the speech of Bangabandhu. I realised that my intention was fulfilled," he said.

The poem was first published in weekly Sachitra Sandhani in 1980 and was incorporated in his poetry collection "Chasabhusar Kabyo", published in February 1981.

Nirmalendu, in his epic poem "Swadhinata Ei Shobdoti Kivabe Amader Holo", also described the situation in place for the historic speech.

In his poem, he termed Bangabandhu's speech an immortal poem.

Saluting unsung women heroes

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Similarly, Bibha Rani was separated from her family while they were trying to escape from their home in Barishal. She was captured by Razakars and tortured. She has never been officially recognised as a Birangana even though she applied a few times.

"I am not capable of saying anything. The war was in 1971. It is now 2020. It has been so many years. I am tired of fighting. But I am happy today, because of our sacrifice, so many are now free," said Bibha, while receiving her award.

She dedicated a song she crafted in the mournful, wistful Bhatiali style, to the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, describing him as the orsman to her boat.

"Please forgive us, mother," said the programme's moderator Sharmin Nahar Lucky, "but good news is that IPDC Finance has taken the financial responsibility of these two women".

Chief guest Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen handed crests while IPDC CEO and Managing Director Mominul Islam gave the two awardees cheques of Tk 2 lakh each.

The momentous event was graciously hosted by Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden, which was also a hospitality partner.

The evening began with a heart-rending poetry recital by Panchakanya, a repertoire consisting of Sharmin Lucky, Tamanna Titli, Kazi Bushra, Naznin Naz, Habiba Sultana and Sharmin Mrittika.

"Man is not a standard of any sort, why would we want to be their equal? I have become a successful 'human' instead," they recited, powerful lines written by poets Rita Nahar, Shashwati Biplob, Dil Afroze, and Jinal Islam.

In his address, IPDC's Mominul Islam said, "Fifty women were nominated and nine selected for the honour."

"Their contribution is not an isolated event -- the change that has come to Bangladesh is a story crafted by its women. It is the story of the 35 lakh women workers of our ready-made

garment industry, the story of every household in our villages which are production powerhouses," he said.

The jury included Anisul Hoque, associate editor of Prothom Alo; Rokia Afzal Rahman, chairperson of Mediaworld Ltd; Dr Maleka Banu, general secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad; and Anna Minj, director, Community Empowerment, Gender Justice, Diversity and Integrated Development Programmes at Brac.

The jurors who made the extremely difficult decision of choosing who to honour, handed crests to the awardees, except Tepru and Bibha.

Rasheda K Chowdhury, executive director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), handed a crest and a cheque of Tk 2 lakh to Laily Begum. Laily is the first licensed hilsa fisherwoman of the country.

A primary schoolteacher, Kamrunnahar Munni was awarded next for forming a football team of girls in her hometown of Tangail. She was awarded by Maleka Banu.

Sonu Rani Das was awarded by Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation. Sonu is the first female graduate from the Dalit community.

Kohinur Begum was awarded by Anisul Hoque. Kohinur had created a successful foodbank for women at risk of climate change induced calamities, in her community in a remote village of Sirajganj.

Mamatz Mahal Baby was awarded by Rokia Afzal Rahman. Baby established a successful library in her home at a former enclave of Kurigram.

The next awardee was Jaya Chakma, the first female Fifa referee of Bangladesh. She was awarded by Farah Kabir, executive director, ActionAid.

Joya Chakma put her feelings aptly. "When I was a child, I used to think that I will do something one day that will make people recognise me. I thought I will have to stay with courageous people for that. Today I am with courageous women."

Unfortunately, the next awardee

could not receive the award last night -- Marzia Rabbani Shashi, the country's first blind female lawyer is going through life-threatening conditions. Her mother Afroza Rabbani accepted the award on her behalf from Parveen Mahmud, chairperson of UCEP, Bangladesh.

Afroza Rabbani brought everyone back from the throes of euphoria by stating her current reality -- her daughter, the awardee, is fighting for her life because neither of her kidneys are functioning. They have a donor, but are not being able to carry out the organ transplant because law forbids kidney donation from other than immediate family members, she said.

"The light of the eyes is nothing; the light of the mind is everything. But now the light of her life is going out. Save my little girl, my beautiful girl,"

In December last year, the High Court ruled that voluntary donors beyond near relatives could donate kidneys to patients with renal failure.

At present, the law allows only parents, children, brothers and sisters, spouse, grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, maternal and paternal uncles and aunts to donate their kidneys to patients. The HC also ordered the government to amend the act within six months.

In his address, the foreign minister, AK Abdul Momen, said, "I am grateful to witness these stars. I also feel small seeing them. Their contribution, their will to impact change is an inspiration for us. What we are doing is not enough, there is more to do."

"Confidence and sheer will -- that is why nothing could stop them," he said.