

I couldn't save her or my grandchild

Says grieving man about daughter-in-law, grandson

SAJJAD HOSSAIN and SANAD SAHA

Arifa clutched her baby boy tightly to her chest as if to protect him from harm as the launch, being rammed by the bow of a much larger cargo vessel, shook violently.

She was still holding the baby when the launch sank within seconds in the Shitalakkhya Sunday afternoon.

Arifa Begum, 30, and 18-month-old Safayet Hossain were among the eight people who died as the launch capsized.

Rescuers are still looking for four individuals who were on that launch, said Abdullah Al Arefin, deputy assistant director at Fire Service and Civil Defence in Narayanganj.

Arifa's father-in-law Abdur Rob, 65, was travelling with her on the launch.

"I held Arifa's hand tightly and she held her baby when the launch started to sink. I don't know when and how I lost her. I could not save them... I swam ashore and then lost consciousness," the grieving man, a resident of Ramzan Beg area in Munshiganj, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Police yesterday handed over the victims' bodies to their family members.

Confirmed death toll from the tragedy reached eight as rescuers found the bodies of Khairun Fatema, 42, head teacher of Sonargaon Horiya Government Primary School in Narayanganj, and an unidentified man in his late 20s.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) yesterday filed a murder case against eight crew members of the cargo vessel, MV Rupsi-9, with Bandar Police Station.

The accused are: First Class Master Ramjan Ali, Second Class Master Nurul Alam, engineers Ariful Islam and Nadim Hossain, and staff members Sumon Hossain, Yasin Mia, Riyad Hossain and Sukani Jahidul Islam.

A court yesterday granted three-day remand for each of them, said Dipak Kumar Saha, officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station.

Additional District Magistrate Shameem Bepari, who is heading a probe into the incident, said, "As per our initial findings... it seems drivers of both the vessels were operating recklessly."

"I held Arifa's hand tightly and she held her baby when the launch started to sink. I don't know when and how I lost her. I could not save them... I swam ashore and then lost consciousness."



A neighbour tries to console a relative of Hatem Ali Bepari at his home in Munshiganj Sadar's Jognighat area yesterday. Hatem, 60, has been missing since a small launch capsized after being hit by a large cargo vessel in the Shitalakkhya on Sunday. He was returning home after taking treatment at a hospital in the capital.

PHOTO: SAJJAD HOSSAIN

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Dhaka a 'hotbed'

Finds a CGS analysis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka is a hotbed for enforced disappearances, stated a CGS report launched yesterday.

The Centre for Governance Studies, in its report titled 'Where are they: enforced disappearance in Bangladesh', tracked down and analysed 71 cases of enforced disappearances between 2019 and 2021, and found that 26 of those cases – a third – were just from Dhaka.

Families of 52 victims alleged that people identifying themselves as law enforcers picked them up.

The report states that of the allegations made, Rapid Action Battalion was named in 40 percent of the cases, followed by Detective Branch of the Police, whose name came up in 30 percent.

Khulna, Mymensingh, Chattogram and Narayanganj each had between six and eight cases of enforced disappearances in the last three years, the report said.

About a third of those who were forcibly disappeared were shown arrested while a quarter are still missing.

Seven percent of the victims turned up dead.

Of the 23 who came back, none of them said a word.

Most of the victims of enforced disappearance were politicians and businesspeople, the researchers found. Seven percent were Islamic preachers.

Even students were not spared, accounting for 11 percent of all cases.

Other than those, there were three journalists, found the report.

The researchers had gathered all the data by scanning newspapers during this time period.

"The government should set up an independent commission to investigate cases of enforced disappearances," said Professor Ali Riaz, distinguished professor of political science at Illinois State University, in a virtual discussion yesterday.

"It must immediately provide information on the victims to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced Disappearance and allow the group to visit Bangladesh."

The research also pointed out that enforced disappearances increased in the years that the national election

took place.

Nur Khan Liton, secretary general of Ain o Salish Kendra, warned about a similar increase in this phenomenon during the upcoming elections.

Dr Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of Shushanoer Jonno Nagorik, said enforced disappearances are gaining legitimacy among law enforcement.

"I once had the chance to interview a law enforcer involved with forcibly disappearing people. He told me that they are trying to rid society of crime by perpetrating these acts."

Liton claimed, "There were a few victims who came back, who have spoken privately, if not publicly. It is clear from descriptions of their conditions that our country has certain secret detention centres... We need to investigate where these are."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association, said law enforcers are tasked with finding missing people – not making them go missing.

The programme was moderated by Zillur Rahman, executive director of CGS.

902 brought back from Libya in six months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 902 Bangladeshis who became undocumented in Libya and were taken to different detention centres have been brought back home since September last year.

Seheli Sabrin, director general (consular and welfare) of the foreign ministry, yesterday said they were brought back with support from International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

A government committee comprising officials of different ministries visited the returnees at the Hajj Camp in the capital's Ashkona yesterday.

Seheli said while talking with the returnees, they found that after being tricked by traffickers, many attempted to reach Europe illegally via Libya and Tunisia.

70-yr-old woman dies after son assaults her

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A 70-year-old woman died after her son allegedly assaulted her in Mymensingh Sadar upazila yesterday.

The victim was Hafiza Khatun, and her son is Abdull Mannan, from Kokil village of the upazila, police said.

Quoting locals, Kotwali Police Station OC Shah Kamal Akanda said there was an altercation between Hafiza and Abdull's wife Hajera Khatun around 11.00am. When Abdull learned of the matter, he started punching Hafiza indiscriminately, injuring her critically.

She died on way to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH). Mannan and Hajera fled the area, the OC said, adding that no case had yet been lodged.

Body of retired teacher recovered in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police on Sunday recovered the body of Monowara Begum, a retired professor of Patuakhali Government College, from Kacha river in Patuakhali Sadar upazila, a day after she had gone missing.

The 70-year-old, a diabetic, had gone out for a walk around 5:00pm on Saturday and not returned, her husband Ishaq Mollah said.

Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Patuakhali Police Station, said police recovered her body on Sunday night and sent it to Patuakhali General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Investigate Nabayan's death: CHTC

STAR REPORT

Expressing their shock, the International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC) in a statement called for prompt, impartial and effective judicial investigation into the death of political activist Nabayan Chakma Milon alias Sourav.

The statement was signed by co-chairs of CHTC commission Sultana Kamal, Elsa Stamatopoulou and Myrna Cunningham Kain.

In Khagrachhari, a half-day road blockade was observed yesterday protesting death of the United Democratic Front (UPDF) leader.

Electricity now in every house

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for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid, Secretary of the power division of the ministry Md Habibur Rahman, and Ambassador of China to Bangladesh Li Jiming, spoke during the inauguration.

AM Khurshedul Alam, director general of Bangladesh China Power Company (BCPC), delivered the welcome address.

Hasina said the people had been suffering from acute power crisis before the Awami League government assumed power in 1996.

She said for four years in their first term, power generation had increased to 4,300 MW from just 1,500 MW.

The prime minister said after 2001, the country had again fallen into acute power crisis as power generation was reduced to 3,200 MW.

Explaining the claim of 100 percent coverage, officials of the Ministry of Energy, Power and Mineral Resources said they provided connections to everyone who applied for it.

"We have electricity coverage in every area of the country either from the national grid or the solar home system," said Mohammad Hossain, director general of Power Cell. "We have coverage. But if someone doesn't apply, we can't force them to."

In some parts of Chattogram Hill Tracts where the national grid didn't reach, they had solar home systems. Some islands like Hatiya have engines to produce power locally, he added.

Around 4.21 crore connections have been provided till date, according to BPDB data.

Payra Plant The \$2.48 billion coal-fired power plant, using Ultra Supercritical Technology, is the 13th in the world and seventh in South Asia.

Ultra Supercritical Technology aims at protecting the environment in line with the government's policy, BPDB officials said.

After undergoing test runs for about five months, the first unit of the Payra power plant started commercial operations in May, 2020 and the second unit in October, 2020.

The Power Transmission Company of Bangladesh (PGCB) had undertaken a number of projects to distribute electricity from the Payra plant.

These projects include construction of a 160km 400kV double circuit line from Payra to Gopalganj, a 164.6km Aminbazar-Mawa-Gopalganj-Mongla 400 kV double circuit line and a 9.4km river-crossing line close to Padma Bridge.

PGCB officials said all these projects are targeting power distribution from both Payra and Rampal plants and will cost about Tk 4,650 crore, of which Tk 3,294 crore will be spent on the Payra plant's transmission facilities.

Officials of the Payra plant said they have been operating the two units in alternative months to keep the plant's equipment operational.

The authorities expected to supply about 80-85 percent of the plant's

electricity to the southern part of the country.

Officials said the plant will be operated at full steam only once the 440kV transmission line is established through the Padma river.

The power plant is burning some 13,000 tonnes of coal a day. It has a 76.30 acre dumping zone where 25 years' worth of by-product can be kept.

The plant is currently importing coal from Indonesia. It has its own jetty whose conveyor belts can unload 3,200 tonnes of coal every hour from four vessels at the same time.

[With inputs from BSS and UNB]

WHO sounds alarm on TB fight funds

AFP, Geneva

The world is spending nowhere near enough to revive the fight against tuberculosis after the Covid-19 crisis wiped out years of progress, the WHO said yesterday.

Ahead of World Tuberculosis Day on Thursday, the World Health Organization said global spending on TB diagnostics, treatments and prevention in 2020 was less than half of the global target of \$13 billion annually by 2022.

"TB remains one of the world's deadliest infectious killers. Each day, over 4,100 people lose their lives to TB and close to 30,000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease," the WHO said.

Bangladesh among the worst

FROM PAGE 1

The UN report citing data of 2010 said an estimated 30 cubic kilometres of total groundwater was withdrawn annually in Bangladesh at that time. And nearly 86 percent of the water went for irrigation.

Conservationists and experts, however, referred to a World Bank report in 2018 and said the amount of water being extracted from the ground is estimated to be 32 cubic kilometres annually.

Around 90 percent of the extracted water was used for irrigation and 10 percent for domestic and industrial purposes, said the WB report titled "Multi-Hazard Groundwater Risks to the Drinking Water Supply in Bangladesh".

It's genocide

FROM PAGE 1

the forced deportation of Rohingyas.

However, the Myanmar's military has denied the genocide allegation.

Meanwhile, in February 2021 Myanmar's military seized power in a coup after complaining of fraud in a November 2020 general election won by democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi's party. Election monitoring groups found no evidence of mass fraud.

Blinken yesterday said Min Aung Hlaing led the 2021 coup.

"Since the coup, we have seen the Burmese military use many of the same tactics. Only now the military is targeting anyone in Burma it sees as opposing or undermining its repressive rule.

Groundwater extraction is increasing alarmingly every year, which poses serious threats to the water reservoirs and also increases the risks of droughts and pollution.

Approximately 5 percent to 24 percent of the land area in Bangladesh is exposed to extremely high to high risks of elevated arsenic, salinity and groundwater depletion hazards, according to the WB report.

The report also estimated that 4.5 percent to 17 percent of the total population of Bangladesh are exposed to extremely high to high risks of elevated arsenic, salinity and groundwater depletion hazards.

And about 2.2 million to 8.6 million of these

vulnerable populations are poor.

The excessive extraction of groundwater could lead to a drinking water crisis and spread the intrusion of salinity in the coastal areas, said Tanvir Ahmed, a professor of the civil engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

"There could be incidents of land subsidence in some areas," he said.

The UN report said groundwater already provides half of the volume of water withdrawn for domestic use by the global population, and about 25 percent of all water withdrawn for irrigation, serving 38 percent of the world's irrigated land.

development. There are now obligations that include stopping military supplies to the Myanmar military and imposing economic sanctions.

The Rohingya issue has almost been out of spotlight for more than two years, but it is likely to come to the fore again with the US decision.

"The world's major powers were hesitant about the Rohingya issue. They had been hoping democracy would return to Myanmar, but the hope faded with the military coup.

"With the genocide determination, the justice process is likely to be hastened up," Mofidul told The Daily Star.

This can also help speed up the Rohingya repatriation process, he observed.

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed, director at the Centre for

Groundwater storage depletion occurs when discharge exceeds recharge. Although climate variability and climate change can play a role, most cases of long-term groundwater storage depletion result from intensive abstraction.

The rate of global aggregated groundwater storage depletion is considerable: for the beginning of the present century, the estimates are mostly between 100 and 200 cubic kilometres per year, which accounts for roughly 15 to 25 percent of total groundwater withdrawals, it added.

Bangladesh requires about 2.75 million litres of water per day, 80 percent of which are extracted from the groundwater, according

to the Department of Public Health Engineering.

The remaining supply of water is met by the surface water.

Around 90 percent of the country's water is used for farming, 6 percent for industrial and institutional purposes and only 4 percent for drinking and household purposes, said Mohammad Saifur Rahman, Superintending Engineer of groundwater circle of DPHE.

The water table in cities like Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Barishal, Tongi, Gazipur and Narayanganj depleted significantly as water could be found in these areas after boring more than 200 feet from the earth surface, he said.

he told The Daily Star.

John Sifton, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, said Myanmar's military has faced "few real consequences for its atrocities, whether against Rohingya or other ethnic minority groups in Myanmar".

As well as imposing more economic sanctions on the junta, the United States should press for a UN Security Council resolution that would refer all the military's alleged crimes to the International Criminal Court, Sifton said.

If Russia and China veto a resolution, as is likely, Washington should lead action in the UN General Assembly, he said. "Condemnations of Myanmar should be coupled with concrete actions."