

Bodies of five fishermen found in Bay

STAR REPORT

Five bodies were recovered yesterday from the Bay of Bengal in Cox's Bazar after a fishing trawler capsized on Friday in rough seas caused by a depression.

The bodies were recovered from different points in Cox's Bazar's Nazirartek area in the morning.

"With the latest recovery, the death toll from the trawler capsize reached seven," said Inspector Selim Uddin, of Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station.

One fisherman is still missing, the police officer said.

The trawler with 19 fishermen capsized near Cox's Bazar town. Coast guards and other fishermen rescued 11 of them. The bodies of two fishermen – Md Aiyub and Saiful – were recovered on Saturday.

The five victims, whose bodies were recovered yesterday, are Hossain Ahmed, Mohammad Absar, Azizul Haque, Nazir Hossain and Nurul Islam.

Meanwhile, around 150 fishermen have reportedly gone missing as least 16 fishing trawlers went down in the Bay in Patuakhali and Barguna.

Ansar Uddin Molla, president of Alipur Fishing Warehouse Owners' Association, said at least 50 Alipur fishermen were still missing.

Golam Mostafa Chowdhury, president of Barguna District Trawler Owners' Association, said over 100 Barguna fishermen were still traceless.

Akhtar Morshed, officer-in-charge of Kuakata naval police outpost, said the operation to rescue the missing fishermen and trawlers was continuing.

In another development, coast guard, in a press release issued yesterday, said it rescued 44 fishermen from the Bay.

[Our correspondents in Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali contributed to this report.]

Death toll in Somalia hotel siege climbs to 21

AFP, Mogadishu

The death toll from a devastating 30-hour siege by Al-Shabaab jihadists at a hotel in Somalia's capital Mogadishu has climbed to 21, Health Minister Ali Haji Adan said Sunday, as anxious citizens awaited news.

Emergency workers have been trying to clear the debris of a gun and bomb attack by the Al-Qaeda-linked group on the popular Hayat hotel which left parts of the building in ruins, with many feared trapped inside the venue.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paying respect to the victims of the August 21 grenade attack after placing a floral wreath at a temporary memorial at the party's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Ukraine warns of 'cruel' Russian action

Zelensky urges vigilance ahead of Independence Day

AGENCIES

President Volodymyr Zelensky urged vigilance ahead of Wednesday's celebrations of 31 years of Ukraine's independence from Soviet rule, as shells rained down near Europe's biggest nuclear plant and Russian forces struck in the south and east.

Ukrainians must not allow Moscow to "spread despondency and fear" ahead of the August 24 events, which also mark six months since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Zelensky said in his nightly video address on Saturday.

"Russia could try to do something particularly disgusting, particularly cruel," he added.

In Russia, the daughter of an ultra-nationalist Russian ideologue who advocates Russia absorbing Ukraine was killed in a suspected car bomb attack outside Moscow on Saturday evening, Russian state investigators said yesterday.

They said Darya Dugina, daughter of prominent ideologue Alexander Dugin, was killed after a suspected explosive device detonated on the Toyota Land Cruiser she was travelling in, and they were considering "all versions" when it came to working out who was responsible.

The nightly curfew in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, regularly hit by Russian shelling, will be extended for the entire day

on Wednesday, regional Governor Oleh Synchuk told residents on the Telegram messaging app.

As the war that has killed thousands and forced millions to flee heads for its half-year mark, Ukrainian military and local officials reported more Russian strikes overnight on targets in the east and south of the country, reports Reuters.

Ukraine's general staff said on Facebook early yesterday that over the past 24 hours Russian forces had conducted several

"Russia could try to do something particularly disgusting, particularly cruel."

– Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

attempted assaults in Donbas. The eastern border region controlled in part by pro-Moscow separatists has been a prime target of Russia's campaign in the past months.

In the south, Russian forces conducted a successful assault on a village of Blahodatne at the border between Kherson and Mykolaiv regions. The city of Mykolaiv was hit with multiple S-300 missiles early yesterday, regional governor

Vitaliy Kim said on Telegram.

The area on the Black Sea coast has seen some of the fiercest fighting of the past weeks.

To the northeast, the city of Nikopol, which lies across the Dnipro river from Zaporizhzhia, Europe's biggest nuclear plant, was shelled on five different occasions overnight, regional governor Valentyn Reznichenko wrote on Telegram. He said 25 artillery shells hit the city, causing a fire at an industrial premises and cutting power to 3,000 residents.

The fighting near the Russian-controlled plant and Saturday's missile strike at the southern Ukrainian town of Voznesensk, not far from the country's second-largest nuclear plant, revived fears of a nuclear accident.

The attack on Voznesensk was "another act of Russian nuclear terrorism", state-run Energoatom, which manages Ukraine's four nuclear energy generators, said in a statement.

Further west, five Kalibr missiles were fired from the Black Sea at the Odessa region overnight, according to the regional administration, citing the she southern military command.

Two were shot down by Ukrainian air defences while three hit grain storage, but there were no casualties.

Two killed in train accidents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two people were killed in train accidents in Tangail's Kalihati upazila yesterday.

Of them, one was identified as Mohammad Mamun, 40, of Sirajganj, but another could not be identified immediately.

Mamun was hit by a Dhaka-bound train in Anallabari area when he was sitting on Joydebpur-Bangabandhu Bridge track around 7:00am. He died on the spot.

Meanwhile, the unidentified woman was hit by another train in Soratol area on the same track.

On information, police recovered the bodies, said Mohammad Saqlain, sub-inspector of Gharinda Railway Police Outpost.

Mamun's body was handed over to his relatives and the woman's body was sent to Dhaka for collecting DNA samples, he added.

No death from Covid for three days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate reported no death from Covid-19 for three straight days yesterday.

In the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, a total of 173 fresh cases were detected in the country, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

So far, the Covid-19 claimed a total of 29,315 lives in the country. The first death was reported on March 18, 2020.

With the latest count, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 2,009,970.

Yesterday, the positivity rate was 3.76 percent based on 4,603 samples tested countrywide.

At least 372 patients have recovered from Covid-19 within this time.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 19,53,740 and the recovery rate at 97.20 percent, added the release.

10 sued over girder tragedy in Uttara

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Ten people have been sued over the girder tragedy in the capital's Uttara.

Shahida Khanam, wife of victim Ayub Hossain Rubel, filed the case against them with the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim yesterday, said sources.

After a hearing, the magistrate took cognisance of the case and recorded the complainant's statements.

The magistrate also directed the officer-in-charge of Uttara Paschim Police Station to investigate into the complaint and submit a report before the court by November 9.

On Friday, the 10 accused were placed on different periods of remand in another case filed by Uttara Paschim Police in connection with the incident.

Five people were crushed to death after a segment of a box girder of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project fell from a crane on a car on August 15.

Mushrooming despite rising fatalities

FROM PAGE 1

The number of deaths, however, is much lower than those counted by several non-governmental organisations. The Road Safety Foundation, an NGO working to ensure transport safety, said at least 219 people were killed in 116 accidents at level crossings from January 1, 2020 to July 29 this year.

According to the foundation's data, 74 people were killed in 35 accidents at level crossings till July this year, while 76 lives were lost in 43 accidents last year and 69 lives in 38 accidents in 2020.

Amid a rise in such accidents, the railways ministry yesterday decided to issue a circular, asking all not to build any level crossings without the BR's permission.

The decision was taken at an inter-ministerial meeting at the Rail Bhaban in the capital as part of efforts to prevent railroad-related accidents and improve safety at level crossings.

The move comes about a month after 11 people were killed as a train hit a microbus at a level crossing in Chattogram's Mirsharai upazila on July 29. Two more died from wounds later.

The level crossing was legal but reportedly there was no gatekeeper there at the time of the accident.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan and representatives from the LGRD and road transport and bridges ministries, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Roads and Highways Department (RHD), and Dhaka north and south city corporations, among others, attended the meeting chaired by Rail Secretary Humayun Kabir.

UNAUTHORISED LEVEL CROSSINGS

As per the law, if any agency wants to build a level crossing, it needs to take the BR's approval. But government agencies care little about taking permission.

The Daily Star in February 2019 ran a report on unprotected level crossings, citing the August 2018 data

of the BR.

At that time, the total number of unauthorised level crossings stood at 1,085 – 811 in East Zone and 274 in West Zone of the BR.

Nine government agencies built those unauthorised level crossings at that time, with the LGED constructing the highest number of unauthorised level crossings – 452.

At yesterday's meeting, BR Director (Engineering) Mohiuddin Arif made a presentation which showed that of the 3,111 level crossings in the country, 1,886 are legal and 1,225 are unauthorised.

This means the number of unauthorised level crossings rose by 140 since August 2018.

At least 76 unauthorised level crossings were built since January 2021 when an inter-ministerial meeting was held to find ways to prevent accidents at unprotected level crossings, show relevant documents.

Of the unauthorised level crossings, 861 are in East Zone and 364 in West Zone, according to the documents.

The LGED built the highest number of unauthorised level crossings – 510 – while different union parishads constructed 487 crossings, city corporations 70, municipalities 102, upazila parishads four, port authorities five, food department three, the RHD three and other entities 40.

Asked why agencies don't take BR's approval before building level crossings, a top BR official said it usually takes some time for agencies to get the BR's approval. Besides, if any agency takes the BR's approval, it has to bear the cost of related infrastructure and pay salaries of the gatekeepers.

MEETING DECISIONS

Following the July 29 accident at Mirsharai, the railways ministry held a meeting with BR and LGED officials on August 11 and asked them to complete the joint survey on level crossings by next month and recommend ways to improve safety at the crossings. The survey was launched last year.

Talking to this newspaper last night, Rail Secretary Humayun Kabir said that yesterday's meeting was part of the ministry's effort to improve safety at the level crossings.

He said that though the law makes it mandatory for any agency to take the BR's approval for building a level crossing, the ministry decided to issue a circular and send it to the agencies concerned to stop further construction of unauthorised level crossings.

Besides, all the agencies were asked to take necessary measures in line with the recommendations to be made in the joint survey report, he said.

In reply to a query, he said that if the railway decides to employ gatekeepers for all unauthorised level crossings, it has to recruit 10,000 people for this purpose only.

"It's not possible for the railway. We have asked the government agencies concerned to deploy gatekeepers at the level crossings [that they built over the years]."

About the legal level crossings that remain unmanned, he said they are working to recruit more gatekeepers. Besides, steps have been taken to regularise the temporary gatekeepers employed under different projects.

Asked how 140 unauthorised level crossings were built in the last four years, the secretary didn't give a direct answer.

"We have decided to issue the circular as soon as possible, otherwise more unauthorised level crossings could be built," he said.

At the meeting, the railways minister said the BR gets the blame whenever an accident occurs at a level crossing though it's not liable for most of the accidents, a ministry official, who was present there, told this newspaper.

Sujan asked all agencies concerned to work unitedly to prevent accidents at level crossings, the official said seeking anonymity.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach LGRD Minister Tazul Islam for comments.

Amendments go against views of stakeholders

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journalists after the meeting in June.

This proposed amendment to the Press Council Act 1974 was sent to the information ministry by the Press Council.

Before sending the amendment to the cabinet, neither had stakeholders given their approval nor was it made public to editors and journalists, who would be affected by it.

A statement by Sampadak Parishad published yesterday stated that the Parishad requested a copy of the proposed amendment this month but the council refused to disclose it, stating that it is under the jurisdiction of the ministry. This correspondent too, was told the same.

Bangladesh Press Council Chairman Justice Nizamul Huq Nasim told The Daily Star that the council's senior journalist-representatives had been consulted, and gave their blessings. He said these conversations happened before his tenure began in late 2021.

However, annual reports of 2017 to 2020 (2021's is yet to be released) show that the council had discussed the amendment about increasing punishment with their board members only once and nobody definitively agreed to it.

Meeting minutes show that on April 17, 2019, the council's Secretary Shah Alam told all present that a draft of the amended Press Council Act has been sent to the ministry for approval, and presented a draft.

The board saw it, and decided to review the draft shown, and amend the law after reviewing.

They also agreed to discuss whether a new press council law is needed or whether the current one can be amended.

But the proposed amendment was approved in principle by the cabinet without any of those discussions, according to journalists and editors.

On the other hand, the council's annual reports of 2017 to 2020 show that the board had discussed increasing protection for journalists during several of its meetings, and had even finalised a draft of that amendment to the Press Council Regulation 1980.

No headway has been made concerning this as of yet, confirmed Justice Nasim to this correspondent recently.

"We are still in the process of working

on it. It has not been done yet," he said.

The amendment to the regulation about protecting journalists was first discussed on March 28, 2017.

On that day, the board met and officially decided that the Press Council Regulation should be amended to take complaints from journalists being harassed, tortured or obstructed from carrying out their duties.

The council's former chairperson Justice Mohammed Momtaz Uddin Ahmed presided over the meeting, and out of five decisions made that day, this was the first.

Late Golam Sarwar, a council board member and former editor of Daily Samakal, had commented, "The Press Council must maintain a functional role in helping journalists perform their duties. Undoubtedly, this is a praiseworthy initiative and can be incorporated into the Press Council Regulation."

In a meeting the following month, they again decided to amend the regulation and finalised the draft of the amendment.

One of the amendments presented at that meeting stated, "Publisher, Editor and any working journalist may lodge a complaint against any government or non-government institutions or any individual for violating press freedom or constitutional right" and the council may recommend to the body concerned to take appropriate departmental action."

"The individual or institutions concerned shall be provided with an opportunity to appear or clarify before passing any order or recommending an action," it added.

Another amendment stated that journalists can lodge complaints with the council against government and non-government bodies and individuals for "restricting in gathering of information and dissemination of news of public interest and importance and also for causing bodily assault and harassment ... the Council will inquire into the matter and if it is satisfied that it is necessary to do so, it may, for reasons to be recorded in writing, warn, admonish or censure the concerned and/or the Council shall recommend to take appropriate departmental action to the government or non-government institutions or authority and the compliance has to be informed

to the Council".

For both offences, the Press Council can take suo motu action if they notice any violations. Furthermore, they can assign council members and experts to "inquire into the matter appearing at the spot/place of occurrence".

In short, the council can receive complaints, investigate and admonish offenders themselves or recommend authorities to take departmental action, according to the amendment to the regulation being prepared in 2017.

The amendment stated, "The decision of the Council as the case may be shall be final and shall not be questioned in any court of law."

The council's then chair Justice Momtaz Uddin Ahmed presided over the meeting.

In August that year, they once again met and talked about ensuring that the decision taken earlier was being implemented.

In that meeting, the late Riaz Uddin Ahmed, a journalist and council board member, said, "We have sought to amend the Press Council Regulation to make sure that journalists working in the mass media industry are not subject to harassment or torture or do not face obstacles when carrying out their professional duties."

But that was the last time the council would discuss the issue according to the meeting minutes of the next three years.

The TIB yesterday demanded that the proposed amendment of the Press Council Act be disclosed and stakeholders be consulted.

"We have noticed that the Press Council has been attempting to amend the law to empower itself for several years. But the amendment has been kept hidden, and the council has also refused to provide the Sampadak Parishad with a copy. Since freedom of expression and media, and the well-being of journalists and the press is directly impacted by this law, it is essential that they be consulted at every step of the amendment," said a statement by TIB quoting the organisation's executive director Iftekharuzzaman.

"A logical question arises about whether the government is being secretive so as to use the Press Council to control the press, instead of protecting it," he said.