



17 killed as bus plunges into pond

Survivors point fingers at driver for careless driving

SUSHANTA GHOSH and KM HABIBUR RAHMAN

The traffic on the road was quite light and the bus was moving at a speed of 40 to 50mph. It was meant to be a regular morning ride from Bhandaria to Barishal.

When the driver started striking conversations with the bus's supervisor and some passengers, no one on the bus knew about the nightmare that would befall them soon.

The driver kept talking to the supervisor, often looking at him sideways or over his shoulder. At one point, he lost control over the wheel and the bus skidded off the road and into a pond in Jhalakathi.

That was how survivors and eyewitnesses described the accident that killed at least 17 people, including three children, and injured 35 others in Chhatrakanda area yesterday.

They also said the bus was overloaded with passengers, which might have contributed to the crash.

The Barishal-bound bus of Bashar Smriti Paribahan, which was carrying over 60 passengers against its capacity of 52, left Pirojpur's Bhandaria around 9:00am and fell into the roadside pond on the Barishal-Khulna highway around 10:00am.

"I saw the driver was talking to the supervisor constantly. Suddenly, the bus came off the road and crashed. All the passengers were trapped inside the bus. As it was overloaded, the bus drowned instantly. I could somehow manage to scramble out of the bus," Md Momin, a survivor, told this correspondent at the scene of the accident.

A pall of gloom hovered over the entire area when the bodies were being recovered.

"My cousin Piara Begum was going to Barishal with Sumaiya, her 6-year-old daughter, to visit a doctor. When

The Barishal-bound bus of Bashar Smriti Paribahan was carrying over 60 passengers against its capacity of 52.



Villagers lend a hand to pull a bus out of a pond in Chhatrakanda area of Jhalakathi. The Barishal-bound bus of Bashar Smriti Paribahan, which started from Pirojpur's Bhandaria upazila, fell into the roadside pond on the Barishal-Khulna highway around 10:00am yesterday, leaving 17 passengers dead and 35 others injured.

PHOTO: KM HABIBUR RAHMAN

DENGUE OUTBREAK

Pathology labs swamped

Babies suffer for lack of staff competent enough to collect their blood samples

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Mahmuda Akter stood in line with her sick one-year-old in her arms for a dengue test at the capital's Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital around 10:00am yesterday.

However, she had to wait three more hours just to submit her child's blood sample.

"I was at least able to submit the sample. Many people who brought their babies had to leave without submitting [blood samples]," Mahmuda told The Daily Star on her way back from the dengue sample collection booth around 2:00pm.

She said she was sent to a room on the third floor thrice before they could find someone competent enough to collect the blood from the child.

"The process was quite frustrating.

It's unfortunate that no special arrangements were made for babies in the face of such a huge rush of patients."

On the other hand, hospital authorities said they have been struggling to cope with the overwhelming rush for tests, which has been going on for the past month as dengue cases have been on the rise almost every day.

In Bangladesh, the number of dengue cases usually starts rising in June and reaches its peak in November. However, the cases began rising in May this year.

Since January, 30,685 patients have been hospitalised with dengue, including 2,242 yesterday.

Of them, 167 have died, including 11 yesterday, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

As the number of cases has

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Hasina not afraid of any threat

Quader tells AL rally

STAR REPORT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is not afraid of any visa policy or threat.

"She will never bow down to anyone," he said while addressing the AL's "peace and progress" rally as chief guest at Noakhali's Kabirhat upazila.

Quader, also the road, transport and bridges minister, said Sheikh Hasina's main strength is the country's people, so threats of violence or visa policy or sanctions will not work on her.

He said it is not possible to overthrow the AL

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ROAD ACCIDENTS

Casualties keep mounting for indiscipline

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Indiscipline continues to reign supreme on the roads, taking a heavy toll on lives and properties, as the government's steps to address the malaise remain perfunctory, experts said.

The issue reared its ugly head again yesterday after a "negligently driven" Barishal-bound bus veered off the road and fell into a waterbody in Jhalakathi Sadar upazila -- claiming 17 lives and injuring 35.

Before this accident, there were 2,865 road crashes this year until Friday, killing 2,737 and injuring 4,201, according to data from the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

The actual number of fatalities is higher, according to reports from non-government organisations working for road safety.

"The accident takes place for overspeeding, overtaking and overconfidence," said Mozammel Haque, deputy inspector general (operation) of Highway Police.

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NON-PARTISAN GOVT

It'll all be settled on the streets

Says Fakhrul; BNP to hold grand rally in capital July 27

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There will be no elections without a non-partisan government and the issue will be settled on the streets, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said yesterday.

The party will hold a grand rally in the capital on July 27 to press home its one-point demand for the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and holding the next national polls under a neutral government.

"False cases are being filed to suppress the opposition party. They [the government] are hatching a plot to keep the opposition away from the election through intimidation. But there will be no election unless it's held under neutral government ... The issue will be settled on the streets," Fakhrul told a youth rally at the Suhrawardy Udyan in the capital.

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» A tale of survival and loss -- PAGE 5

» 'They will never return home' -- PAGE 5



Bangladesh batter Fargana Hoque Pinky lets out a loud cheer after reaching a historic maiden ODI hundred – a first for any Bangladeshi in the format in women's cricket – during their series-deciding third match against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The thrilling match ended in a tie as the series was shared 1-1.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigresses tie series in a dramatic fashion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Incredible scenes unfolded at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday as Bangladesh managed to tie the third and final ODI against India.

With India requiring just one run to win off four deliveries to go past Bangladesh's 225, pacer Marufa Akter channeled her fiery determination to remove the final batter, Meghna Singh. Captain Nigar Sultana Joty safely gloved the ball and an ecstatic celebration ensued for the hosts.

Meanwhile, Singh and Jemimah Rodrigues, stranded at the non-striker's end on 33, were clearly

unhappy over the umpire's decision.

Earlier, the visitors' dissatisfaction over some of the umpiring decisions had reached the tipping point as India skipper, Harmanpreet Kaur, was given out leg before.

A visibly furious Kaur had hit the stumps with the bat after getting out and exchanged a few angry words with the umpires on her return towards the dressing room.

Kaur could not hold her anger even during the post-match presentation ceremony. She lashed out on the standard of the umpiring, in a manner which came as a surprise to a rather small crowd in Mirpur.

The India captain was on a venting spree. "Lastly, our High Commissioner

from India is also there and I hope you could have invited him here [at the presentation podium], but that is also fine," she said.

Things went from bad to worse during the official photo session, where the two teams posed with the trophy. Kaur had blurted out, saying, "Where are the umpires? Call them."

The India skipper even channeled her frustration towards her Bangladeshi counterpart, Nigar Sultana Joty. "You guys didn't win, it's the umpires," Kaur said.

Going back to the chase, India were in a spot of bother on 32 for two but opener Smriti Mandhana (59) and Harleen Deol held the ship

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