

2 killed as truck hits motorbike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were killed as a truck coming from the opposite direction hit their motorcycle in Mastul area on 300-foot road in Dhaka early yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Sajib Hossain, 35, and Roman, 33.

Another man, Deen Mohammed, 35, was injured and was receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The accident took place around 4:45am when the trio was returning to Dhaka from Purbachal on the motorbike.

Roman died on the spot, while Sajib and Deen Mohammad were first taken to a nearby hospital, where they were shifted to DMCH in critical condition.

Sajib died around 7:15am while undergoing treatment, said Shahidul Islam, sub-inspector of Khilkhet Police Station.

Police are trying to identify the truck, he added.

Global turbulence the 'new normal'

Warns EU chief von der Leyen as more geo-economic tensions feared this year

AFP, Berlin

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned yesterday that global disruptions and volatility are the "new normal", with more geo-economic tensions on the horizon.

"2024 will be a decisive year, with more geo-economic tensions expected -- from the Red Sea to the Taiwan Strait -- which also means more frequent disruptions to supply chains and greater volatility on the energy markets," she told a climate conference in Hamburg.

"International competition is becoming harder. That is the new normal that we have to deal with."

More frequent extreme weather events added to the mix means Europe needs to pull together "as never before" to face the challenges.

The 27-nation bloc, she assessed, had reacted quickly to curb its dependence on Russian gas after Moscow's fully-fledged invasion of Ukraine

in February 2022.

The emergency meant that the EU was likely to be generating more energy from wind and solar than from gas this year.

But von der Leyen said energy prices needed to come down further, and she urged the "right investment decisions" to make that happen.

Industries in Europe have been severely hit by Russia's war on Ukraine, which has disrupted supply chains and driven up energy prices, sparking sustained inflation.

The difficulties faced by businesses have been compounded by attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

In response, Britain and the United States have struck Houthi targets.

The election in Taiwan of a new president from the Democratic Progressive Party, which rejects China's claim to the island, has also sparked fears of fresh turbulence in East Asia.



Ursula von der Leyen

PTI websites 'blocked' in Pakistan ahead of Feb 8 polls

DAWN ONLINE

Former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party yesterday alleged that its websites were "blocked" in Pakistan and demanded an answer from the federal authorities.

The PTI, deprived of its iconic 'bat' symbol for the upcoming polls, has fielded its leaders as independent candidates with different electoral symbols.

To combat confusion among voters and to ease access to election-related information, the party launched an online portal on its website insaf.pk, as well as a "back-up site", pticandidates.com.

It also introduced a feature whereby voters can message on Imran Khan's official Facebook account to get information about PTI-backed candidates.

Take stern action against dishonest businesspeople

Finance minister asks NBR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali yesterday said stern action should be taken against dishonest businessmen and hoped Customs authorities will pay special attention in this regard.

"One of the responsibilities of customs is to prevent money laundering in the name of trading. And to fulfil this responsibility it is very important to increase the capacity of customs officials," he told a seminar organised at the NBR headquarters in the capital on the occasion of International Customs Day.

He also said one of the main functions of customs is to facilitate trade. "In line with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's aim of building a Smart Bangladesh, customs will become truly smart. The cost of import and export has to be reduced, and this is why we have to focus on full automation.

"Although Bangladesh has made tremendous progress in all economic indicators, our tax-GDP ratio is still not satisfactory. I hope the NBR will try to increase the tax-GDP ratio."

Meanwhile, the minister urged the National Board of Revenue to give incentives to honest businessmen who respect the law.



The 100MW Energoan Solar Power Plant at Borodurgapur in Mongla, Bagerhat.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Clean energy goal far away

FROM PAGE 1

according to the progress report of Bangladesh Power Development Board.

WHY SO SLUGGISH?

Experts say multiple policy issues are blocking the progress of the renewable energy sector. They include heavy tax and duty on imports of solar panels and batteries, non-transparent tariff fixing, and a lack of planning and investment roadmap.

The government backtracking and foot-dragging is another reason, they add.

For instance, in the Power System Master Plan 2016, the government aimed to meet 10 percent of the total electricity demand from renewable sources by 2021, but the plan failed.

Then in 2020, the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh (Vision 2041) made a fresh commitment to generate 10,888MW of renewable energy by 2030. The very next year, the government submitted the Nationally Determined Contributions to the UN, where it slashed the target for 2030 to 4,114MW.

The following year, in 2022, the government unveiled the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan, again raising the minimum target at 6,000MW and maximum target at 16,000MW.

Although officials often cite land scarcity as a major problem, multiple studies show the unused Khas land across the country are more than enough to meet the target; it only requires the political will.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association and Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network are currently doing a study on the division-wise available land for solar plants.

Data from six divisions of the still-ongoing research show these six divisions have ample potentials to generate 2,15,011MW of solar energy.

According to a government projection in its Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan, the country will need about half that amount, or 1,10,800MW, in 2050.

"It is a myth that there is land scarcity in Bangladesh to install solar power plants. Only a small portion of the available Khas land is enough to achieve the target by 2050," the draft report said.

HIGH TAX, HIGH TARIFF

Because it requires one-time investment and no fuel, renewable energy is cheaper around the world compared to fossil fuel based power.

But in Bangladesh, it is the opposite, although the tariff is being reduced over time.

Experts say most renewable power plants in Bangladesh were awarded unsolicited, which created opportunities for businesses to charge high tariff compared to that in neighbouring countries.

"Had the government floated tenders, the prices would have been lower," said M Zakir Hossain Khan, a climate finance analyst and chief executive of Change Initiative, an energy research institution.

TOP 5 RENEWABLE POWER PRODUCING NATIONS

CHINA	11,60,799MW
US	3,51,676MW
BRAZIL	1,75,262MW
INDIA	1,63,013MW
GERMANY	1,48,421MW

Source: International Renewable Energy Agency/2023

"We still have to pay around Tk 16-17 per kilowatts of solar electricity whereas the global average is Tk 5," he said.

China is currently the global leader in renewable energy, followed by the US, Brazil, India and Germany.

In a recent study, the Centre for Policy Dialogue found that the Chinese government provides subsidies in the form of cash grants and tax credits, which led to the fast growth of the sector there.

"The Corporate Income Tax Law and its implementing regulations provide tax incentives to renewable energy projects. They provide an immediate VAT rebate of 50 percent applied to the sale of self-produced solar and wind power equipment. Moreover, enterprises that purchase and use equipment specified by the state for environmental protection, energy and water conservation, or production safety purposes are eligible

for a tax credit of 10 percent of the investment in such equipment," reads the study report.

In contrast, investors in Bangladesh have to pay 37.56 percent tax to set up renewable power plants, said Zakir Hossain of the Change Initiative.

However, as newer technologies arrive, renewable energy prices are expected to fall further, making an even stronger case for a more vigorous push for clean energy.

For example, in the contracts that were awarded last year, tariff was set from \$0.09 to \$0.11 per unit, down from the \$0.15/unit set in 2017 for the Teesta Solar Park, owned by Beximco. This is the highest yet renewable energy tariff set in Bangladesh, experts say.

Tariff for other plants awarded in 2020 and 2021 were fixed at \$0.14 and \$0.13/unit on average.

Global energy think-tank BloombergNEF in a study showed that the cost of solar plants will reduce further by 2030 compared to gas and coal based power plants, which emit massive volumes of carbon into the air.

In the study report on Levelised Cost of Electricity (LCOE) published in October last year, it said the LCOE for a new utility-scale solar project in Bangladesh ranges from \$97-135 per megawatt hour (MWh) today compared to \$88-116 per MWh for a combined cycle gas turbine plant, and \$110-150 per MWh for a coal power plant.

But by 2030, solar will be the cheapest -- \$42 per MWh, against the LCOE for gas at \$94 and coal at \$118 per MWh.

"We should focus on renewable energy as the import dependent fossil fuel-based power plants are eating away the foreign reserve. In contrast, renewable energy needs no fuel cost; it's a blessing for all," said Zakir Hossain, the climate finance analyst.

NO SINGLE UMBRELLA
While looking for data for this story, The Daily Star found that five entities -- Independent Power Producer (IPP) cell 1, 2 and 3, the directorate of renewable energy research and development, and Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA) -- are responsible for implementation of the government's renewable energy plan.

Although SREDA was formed in

2012 as the single authority for this sector, it has no jurisdiction over implementing renewable energy plants that have more than 10MW capacity, said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at CPD.

Moreover, the decision on who will get the contract and at what prices is made by the ministry, creating another layer in the process, he noted.

Contacted, Power Cell Director General Mohammad Hossain said SREDA was indeed established as a single authority, but the government needs to strengthen the organisation and appoint the right people there.

Nevertheless, the country will achieve the clean energy target as planned since the government is enhancing initiatives for rooftop solar, irrigation with solar pumps, and clean energy import from neighbouring countries, he added.

Asked about the high tariff, he said the high price of land in a densely populated country like Bangladesh as well as the transmission cost, which must be borne by the investors in this sector, ultimately push up the cost.

THE RUNNING PLANTS
Nine of the 10 solar plants now in operation are producing electricity at 19 to 21 percent Plant Load Factor (PLF), meaning they are running 4.8 hours a day, mostly in daytime peak hours when the sun shines the most.

Only the country's first solar plant in Jamalpur has been producing less than that -- at 16 percent PLF.

PLF -- a measure of a power plant's capacity utilisation -- is calculated by dividing the total electricity generation in a year by its annual net generation capacity, multiplied by 100.

The current tariff for these plants ranges from Tk 13.92 to Tk 22.64.

Furnace oil-based electricity now costs Tk 17 per unit on average, which is Tk 26 for diesel-based power.

"We should think of solar as a daytime peak hour power producer. The sun shines the most from 9:00am to 3:00pm, when the demand at offices and industries is the highest. During the time, we now use oil-based or gas-based plants to meet the demand. But if we have solar, there will be no need to import fuel," said Prof Mohammad Tamim, Dean of Chemical and Materials Engineering at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).

UN court orders Israel to prevent Gaza genocide

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to Reuters, senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said the ICJ decision is an important development that contributes to isolating Israel and exposing its crimes in Gaza.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt welcomed the ruling.

Saudi Arabia affirmed "its categorical rejection of the Israeli occupation's practices and violations of the United Nations Convention on genocide."

The European Union said it expects "full, immediate and effective implementation" of world court's orders on emergency measures in the genocide case.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian called for Israeli authorities to face justice after the ICJ ruling.

But while the ICJ's decisions are final and without appeal, the court has no way to enforce them.

The court did not rule at this stage on the core of the case brought by South Africa -- whether genocide has occurred in Gaza. But it recognised the right of Palestinians in Gaza to be protected from acts of genocide.

The United States reiterated its position that allegations Israel has committed genocide in Gaza are "unfounded".

"We continue to believe that allegations of genocide are unfounded and note the court did not make a finding about genocide or call for a ceasefire in its ruling and that it called for the unconditional, immediate release of all hostages

being held by Hamas," a State Department spokesperson said.

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa said he expects Israel to abide by the International Court of Justice's ruling that it take measures to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, in a case brought by South Africa.

The 1948 Genocide Convention, enacted in the wake of the mass murder of Jews in the Nazi Holocaust, defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

On the ground, the Israeli military said yesterday it was still engaged in "intensive battles in the heart of Khan Younis" the main city in the south of the enclave, with forces striking dozens of Hamas fighters and infrastructure from the air and ground. It said forces also fired at Hamas targets in northern Gaza and along the Gaza coastline.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts to negotiate a break in the conflict continued. US and Israeli intelligence chiefs were due to meet Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in Europe this weekend, one official told Reuters. A second source said Egypt's intelligence chief would also participate.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron told Reuters in an interview yesterday that talks have made progress on a deal towards a ceasefire in Gaza, bringing more aid into the Palestinian enclave and the release of Israeli hostages.

Police HQ's rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1

The report detailed two incidents of police involvement in snatching, where the victims were unable to identify the criminals and filed cases against unidentified individuals. It is essential to emphasize that our department, committed to upholding the law, conducted comprehensive investigations leading to the identification and subsequent arrest of seven police personnel involved.

The victims' inability to identify the criminals underscores the complexity of such cases. Despite this challenge, the police, through their diligent efforts, succeeded in uncovering the truth. The successful efforts to identify and arrest the seven officers are a testament to the department's commitment to professionalism, justice, accountability, and public safety.

It's noteworthy that the entire report was based mainly on police reports, showcasing our dedication to transparency. But unfortunately, the report, particularly its title, failed to reflect that. The department's proactive approach to addressing internal issues and taking swift action against those involved in criminal activities demonstrates our unwavering commitment to maintaining public trust.

It is essential to recognize that these incidents involve a minuscule fraction of our extensive force of 2 lakh personnel. Bangladesh Police is committed to the zero-tolerance policy to the slightest deviation of any of its members. We treat such deviations as personal liability of the individual concerned and take steps accordingly. Such isolated cases do not define the

entire department's professionalism and integrity.

The report could be construed as an image-building sketch of the police department, had not the title belied its essence. As most people don't go through the whole report and form a perception based just on the headline, the report eventually proved damaging for the police department.

We urge the media to provide a balanced perspective, acknowledging the efforts of the majority of our officers, who diligently serve and protect the community. The commitment of the police force to maintaining public trust and safety remains unwavering.

Our reply
The rejoinder did not challenge any facts of our story.

The only argument it made is that the headline was "misleading," saying, "such isolated cases do not define the entire department's professionalism and integrity."

Firstly, we had no intention to mislead our readers, as our second heading clearly states: "Some police members, immigration officials form syndicate to rob migrants". Secondly, around the world, it is a journalistic practice to make the headings terse due to space constraints.

Our story also clearly mentioned, quoting police sources, that the image of the 2 lakh-strong police force is being tainted as a result of the criminal activities of a section of junior and mid-ranking police officers.

We stand by our report to the word, but regret that the wording of our heading ended up hurting the sentiment of the police members.