

Indian navy rescues 23 Pakistanis from hijacked vessel

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Indian Navy said it had freed the 23 Pakistani crew of an Iranian fishing vessel which was seized by armed pirates off Somalia.

The Al-Kambar 786 was southwest of the Yemeni island of Socotra, in the Arabian Sea, on March 28 when it was reported to have been boarded by nine pirates, according to a naval statement on Friday.

The vessel was intercepted by the navy's INS Sumedha and INS Trishul, leading to "over 12 hours of intense coercive tactical measures" forcing the pirates to surrender, the statement said.

The nine pirates are being brought to India under the domestic law against piracy on the high seas, the navy said in a separate statement on Saturday.

The fishing vessel's crew of 23 Pakistani nationals were safe and received medical checks before being cleared to continue with fishing activities, the statement said.

Piracy incidents east of the Red Sea have resurfaced for the first time in nearly a decade.

Taking advantage of Western forces' focus on protecting shipping from attacks in the Red Sea by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi militants, pirates have made or attempted more than 20 hijackings since November, driving up insurance and security costs and adding to a crisis for global shipping companies.

Dutch hostage drama over, suspect held

AFP, Ede

A hostage drama in the Netherlands that lasted several hours yesterday ended without bloodshed as all four hostages were freed and police took the suspect into custody.

Authorities have said there was no reason to suspect a "terrorist motive" for the ordeal, which took place at a night spot popular with young people in the town of Ede.

Police said they received reports of a potential hostage situation at 5:15am (0415 GMT) at the Cafe Peticcoat, with local media saying a "confused" man burst in as staff were clearing up after a party.

The man was armed with "several knives" that he showed to the hostages, prosecutor Marthyne Kunst told reporters at a news conference in the town hall.

Police are also investigating a black backpack he was carrying with him, amid reports that the hostage-taker had threatened to use explosives.



Pro-Palestinian activists and supporters rally calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza conflict in central London yesterday. Since Israel launched an offensive on October 7, nearly 33,000 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory. PHOTO: AFP

Divorces more prevalent in villages than in cities

Finds BBS survey

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Both marriage and divorce rates are higher in villages compared to cities, according to the latest government survey.

The survey – Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics-2023 (BSVS-2023) was conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and released on March 24.

Conducted in 2023, the nationwide survey on 308,032 families revealed that 168 individuals out of every 10,000 living in villages were married, while the number was 120 in cities.

Meanwhile, in every 10,000 individuals living in villages, 11 people were found to be divorced, while the number was nine in cities.

Across the country in 2023, 11 people were found to be divorced out of 10,000 individuals.

In 2020, of every 10,000 individuals,

eight people got divorced. In 2021, the number was seven, and in 2022, it was 14.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mahbuba Nasreen, a sociologist and pro vice chancellor of Bangladesh Open University, said, "The rise in divorce rates in rural areas can be attributed to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, child marriage, and poverty."



"During the Covid period of 2020-2021, early marriages saw an increase due to various social, economic, and other factors. In 2022 and 2023, divorce rates surged as a result of family conflicts and other issues," she added.

The data on marriage and divorce was collected as part of a larger survey known as BSVS-2023 which also revealed the rising rate of child marriages, Caesarean section (C-section) deliveries, and out-of-school children in Bangladesh.

Israel hits back at UN over Gaza famine warning

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel has hit back against a UN-backed report that warned of imminent famine in Gaza, alleging the assessment contained inaccuracies and questionable sources.

The analysis released last week fuelled international concern by saying half of Gazans are feeling "catastrophic" hunger and projecting a possible famine in the territory's north.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) partnership estimated that 1.1 million people – half the population, according to UN figures – were facing dire conditions.

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths called for Israel to allow unfettered access for aid to the besieged Palestinian territory.

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for Palestinian civil affairs, said Israel "recognises the unfortunate impacts of the war on the civilian population of Gaza".

But it added that Israel does not operate food distribution in Gaza and accused UN agencies of being unable to handle the quantity of aid arriving daily.

"At any given moment there are hundreds of trucks held up at the Gazan side of the Kerem Shalom crossing after having completely been processed by the authorities in Israel," the COGAT reply said.

Tangail AL leader Boro Moni sued for rape again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tangail Awami League leader Golam Kibria, also known as Boro Moni, has once again been sued for rape and is currently on the run.

The 21-year-old victim filed the case under the Women and Children Repression and Prevention Act with Turag Police Station early yesterday.

The college student accused Boro Moni of raping her at gunpoint at his residence in the capital's Uttara on Friday night.

Boro Moni is the vice president of AL's Tangail town unit and secretary general of the district's Bus-Minibus Owners' Association.

He is also the elder brother of Tangail-2 MP Tanvir Hasan Soto Monir.

According to the case statement, Boro Moni took the woman to his flat in Priyanka City residential area in Uttara and raped her there.

Receiving a call from National Emergency Service 999, police rescued the woman from the flat on Friday night but didn't find the accused there.

The victim's mother alleged that police were dilly-dallying to take the case on Friday night and that they were pressuring them to file a case against unidentified people.

The woman filed a written complaint which was later recorded as a case, said Mostafa Anwar, officer-in-charge of Turag Police Station.

The OC said the victim, from Tangail, got acquainted with Boro Moni online two months ago and maintained contact. She came to Dhaka two days ago.

OC Mostafa said the police were trying to arrest the accused.

Earlier, on April 5 last year, Boro Moni was accused in a case filed over raping and torturing a 17-year-old girl in Tangail Sadar. The victim alleged that she became pregnant due to the rape.

On October 9, 2023, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court upheld a High Court order that on July 11 granted bail to Kibria in the rape case.

The apex court passed the order after examining the DNA test report that stated that Kibria is not the biological father of the child of the rape victim.

Kibria's wife Nigar Altam was also accused of torturing the girl in the case filed with Tangail Sadar Police Station on April 6.

Missing child found dead in tobacco field

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Police recovered the body of a six-year-old boy from a tobacco field in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat yesterday, a day after he went missing.

The victim was identified as Roman Islam, son of Aminur Haque of the Kholahati-Setubazar area of the upazila.

Police and locals said Roman went missing Friday afternoon. Later that night, the family lodged a general diary with Aditmari Police Station.

Some locals spotted the body of Roman in a tobacco field in the Setubazar area in the afternoon and informed the police.

Later, the police recovered the child's body and sent it to a hospital morgue for autopsy.

The victim's father Aminur Haque said, "I can't say who killed my son and why."

Mahmud-un-Nabi, officer-in-charge of Aditmari Police Station, said police are investigating the murder.

The family members were preparing to lodge a case in this regard, the OC added.

Primary sees a 25pc rise, secondary 51

FROM PAGE 1

"Instead of being an optional aid for students, guidebooks are now an essential tool for students and teachers."

Note-Books (prohibition) Act, 1980 prohibits printing, publication, import, distribution and sale of guidebooks for students below grade 9.

EFFECT OF COVID-19

Around 4.5 percent of grade 2 students and 6 percent of grade 6 students dropped out of school after

the pandemic.

Of them, 76.6 percent of 2nd graders and 59.8 percent of 6th graders said they left school amid financial hardship. Besides, 3.9 percent primary and 39 percent secondary students fell victim to child marriage.

Of the 276 girl dropouts from secondary schools interviewed, 219 said their parents married them off.

Forty-one percent primary and 58 percent secondary students had internet access at home, but only 24

percent primary and 46 secondary students used it for studies.

The report recommends stipends and targeted financial and academic assistance to bring dropouts back to schools.

Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, co-chair of the education policy formulation committee, said the study only presented a partial picture of the impact of Covid-19.

Noted educationist Rasheda K Choudhury also spoke.

Buet students boycott tests, classes on 2nd day of protest

FROM PAGE 1

Broken when student leaders of other universities entered Buet after 2:00am even though the gates are supposed to be locked at 10:30pm.

They also demanded removal of Prof Mizanur Rahman from the post of director of the directorate of students' welfare for his failure to enforce the rules.

The university on Friday cancelled the residency of Imtiaz, a student of civil engineering department, at a dormitory. It also formed a six-member committee to investigate the allegations and asked it to submit a report by April 8.

Student politics was banned on the campus after the murder of a second-year student named Abrar Fahad by members of Bangladesh Chhatra League at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall on October 7, 2019.

Meanwhile, BCL yesterday demanded lifting of the ban and ridding the campus of the "dark shadow cast by communal forces".

It also denounced the cancellation of Imtiaz's residency at a Buet dormitory.

Vice-Chancellor Satya Prasad

Majumder yesterday said, "We could expel Imtiaz from the dorm. But expulsion from the university requires a systematic process by the disciplinary committee."

The disciplinary committee cannot take an action without an investigation report, he said, adding that the person facing the allegation must get an opportunity to defend himself.

BCL yesterday announced that it would hold a protest rally at the Central Shaheed Minar today, demanding resumption of students politics at Buet.

About the demonstrations, he said, "We have not postponed the exams they had boycotted. They did not even apply for a postponement. We will consider it if they file applications."

In the afternoon, a group of students introducing themselves as Awami League supporters told reporters that several religion-based political organisations were active on the campus.

BCL ON THE FRONT FOOT
BCL yesterday announced that it would hold a protest rally at the Central Shaheed Minar today, demanding resumption of students politics at Buet.

In a press statement, BCL said, "Students of Bangladesh strongly condemn and protest this decision taken by Buet administration [to expel Imtiaz from dorm] as it is unfair, unconstitutional, anti-educational and against fundamental rights."

It claimed that the decision of Buet authorities was a clear violation of multiple articles of the constitution, including the ones concerning freedom of speech and assembly.

The efforts to ban mainstream politics were contributing to turn Buet into a breeding ground for anti-state activities, the press release said.

In another development, Muktijuddho Mancha has announced that it will form a committee to force the Buet administration to withdraw its ban on student politics on the campus.

In a press statement yesterday, the organisation said the committee would be formed at the university to launch a movement against the ban.

Bribery, corruption major investment barriers

FROM PAGE 1

Charges of corruption are very common in public procurement despite Bangladesh publicly subscribing to principles of international competitive bidding.

"Bangladesh launched a national electronic government procurement portal, but US stakeholders have raised concerns about the use of outdated technical specifications, the structuring of specifications to favour preferred bidders and a lack of overall transparency in public tenders."

Several American companies have claimed that their foreign competitors often use their local partners to influence the procurement process and to block awards to otherwise competitive US company bids, the report said.

American companies have reported instances of alleged bid rigging in government tenders in Bangladesh and have also alleged the use of bribery, anti-competitive practices and a lack of transparency in the bidding process, all of which disadvantage US companies bidding on government tenders.

The report also touched upon the difficulties in repatriation of profits, revenue and external payments from Bangladesh.

"US and other international investors have raised concerns that the procedures and requirements for outbound transfers from Bangladesh remain cumbersome, lack transparency and include significant delays for applications to repatriate profits, dividends and other capital, with some companies waiting over a year for approvals."

American companies reported that agency-level regulators continue to present significant obstacles to securing required approvals for remittances in a timely manner, which are required before companies can seek central bank clearance.

Bangladesh's intellectual property (IP) protection remains a lot to be desired, the report said.

"For example, counterfeit and pirated goods are readily available

across Bangladesh," the USTR said, adding that Bangladesh is progressively serving as a source country for counterfeit distributed globally.

US stakeholders have reported potential IP violations in various industries, such as fast-moving consumer goods, apparel, pharmaceutical and software industries.

The lack of investigative expertise of the police and reluctance to initiate independent investigations further exacerbates IP rights holders' ability to enforce their rights.

In addition, IP rights holders have raised concerns about the court's ability to adjudicate fairly IP cases, the report said.

The lack of stakeholder interaction and a public comment process in the development of new patent law in April 2022, copyright amendments in October 2023, and the enactment of the Industrial Design Act in July 2023 remains a concern.

"Bangladesh needs transparent legislative and rulemaking processes that include seeking input from stakeholders in order to address the gaps in IP protection and make meaningful improvements to its IP regime."

To strengthen Bangladesh's IP regime, better coordination among enforcement authorities and other government institutions is crucial.

The USTR also raised concern about the Personal Data Protection Act, which received approval in principle from the cabinet in November last year.

"Despite modifications to narrow the definition of the types of data to which the law is applicable, concerns remain over provisions, particularly in the context of data localisation requirements that could allow access to data by Bangladeshi law enforcement."

The report also raised concern about the regulation for Digital, Social Media and Over the Top (OTT) Platforms, 2021 as those will "grant government authorities sweeping powers to dictate online content with the threat of criminal liability for

firms and employees deemed non-compliant".

Bangladesh has not notified its customs valuation legislation to the World Trade Organisation and has not yet responded to the checklist of issues describing how the WTO Customs Valuation Agreement is being implemented, the report said.

Fresh water access

FROM PAGE 1

call their families over satellite phone on Friday.

Most of the crew members have developed skin problems as they cannot maintain hygiene properly, they said.

The ship's owner, SR Shipping, however, denied receiving any complaint from the crew about the water crisis.

Speaking to their families, the crew members said the pirates brought in a few dumba (fat-tailed sheep), but the meat of those would mostly be consumed by the pirates.

The mother of a crew member yesterday said her son talked to her on Friday morning for several minutes.

She said the crew are using a limited amount of water for drinking and cooking. The crew are still having food from the ship's depleting stock.

The wife of another crew member echoed the same. She said the crew are now being given small quantities of food to make sure that the ship's stock lasts longer.

Giving similar information, the mother of another crew member expressed worries over the prompt release of the crew members.

She said they are yet to get any timeframe from the ship's owning firm for a peaceful solution to the crisis.

"They [officials of the firm] are assuring us of doing everything for the release of the crew members. But we are still not quite sure how long it will take," said the frustrated mother.

Discussions are ongoing with the pirates through a third party, said Mizanul Islam, media adviser of KSRM Group, which owns SR Shipping.

He hoped the pirates would arrange food and water as they did previously in case of any shortage.