

TEESTA BOAT CAPSIZE Girl's body recovered, five still missing

UNB, Kurigram

The body of a two-and-a-half-year-old girl, who went missing after a boat sank in the Teesta River on Wednesday night, was recovered from the river at Jigabarir Char in Ulipur upazila of Kurigram yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Kulsum Satalashkar, daughter of Koyjor Ali.

With this, the death toll from the boat capsizing rose to two.

Enamul Haque, a member of Bazra union parishad, said locals spotted Kulsum's body floating in the river and rescued it in the morning.

Ulipur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Ataur Rahman said Kulsum and six others went missing when a boat carrying 26 people sank in the Teesta river on Wednesday evening.

Later, divers from a local firefighting unit rushed to the spot and recovered the body of a child.

Four people are still missing. They are Anisur Rahman, 30, his wife Rupali Begum, their 9-year-old child Irin, their niece Hira Moni, 9, and Shamim Hossain, 5, son of Azizur Rahman.



The Gowainghat-Pirojpur-Sonarhat road in Sylhet's Gowainghat upazila has been severely damaged by heavy rains and hilly torrents, rendering it unusable for both vehicles and pedestrians. In the past three weeks, Sylhet city has been inundated five times, affecting many areas and causing untold sufferings to locals. At least 21.08 lakh people have been affected by the flash floods in Sylhet, Sunamganj, and Moulvibazar districts, with 53,244 people living shelter centres as of yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

AL MPs blast govt move for allowing legalisation of black money

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two lawmakers from Awami League and one from Jatiya Party yesterday in parliament criticised the government for keeping the provision of whitening black money in the proposed national budget for 2024-25 fiscal.

Participating in the general discussion on the proposed budget, Pran Gopal Datta from Cumilla-7, Zahid Maleque from Manikganj-1, and Nurun Nahar Begum, a JP MP from a reserved seat for women, said there will be a reluctance from taxpayers to pay taxes if the provision for whitening black money is kept.

"As a taxpayer, I have to pay more than 30 percent tax if I have Tk 30 lakh. But those who did not show their money [in their tax returns] last year would legalise that undisclosed income by paying a 15 percent tax. This will make the taxpayers reluctant to pay taxes," said Pran Gopal, a renowned physician and also a former VC of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

He said the finance minister in his budget speech did not say anything about informal economy.

Zahid, a former health minister, said he does not want to see the provision of whitening black money in the proposed budget.

"We will have to curb corruption and cut the tax rate to reduce black money."

He said it is not the low-income people or industrialists but the white-collar people who have black money.

It's high time

FROM PAGE 1

in 1969, and thus came out as the most authentic voice of the people.

The AL faced a crisis following ideological conflicts between Suhrawardy and Bhashani in the late 50s. In the early 60s, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, already popular among students, emerged as a promising leader.

Later, under his leadership, Bangladesh went on to become independent.

The AL faced an existential crisis after August 15, 1975, when its supreme leader Bangabandhu and most of his family members were killed.

Sheikh Hasina, Bangabandhu's elder daughter, returned home from abroad in 1981 and rebuilt the party.

She has been leading the organisation for 43 years as its longest serving chief. Under her leadership, the party has assumed power five times.

Besides, the achievements of Hasina's government are unparalleled compared to those of any other government.

However, some fundamental questions can still be raised as the AL turns 75 today.

Is the party doing justice to its name? Awam, an Urdu word from which its name was derived, means "the people".

Is the party still the "voice" of the people like it was in the past? Is it still true to its ideals today?

The activities of the AL in recent years show that the party has deviated a lot from its core ideals. The party that once considered itself as an activist-oriented organisation has shifted its dependency towards the bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies. It always spoke in favour of people's fundamental rights, but now it is mostly confined to making rhetorical statements on the government's development activities.

Businesspeople are now gaining more influence in the party ranks surpassing the politicians. The party that had fought to ensure people's voting rights has now developed a system of electing public representatives unopposed and holding electoral contests among the AL members amid boycott by a large number of opposition parties.

In many of his speeches during 1972-75, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had mentioned corruption as the main evil hindering the country's development. He had dreamt of a corruption- and exploitation-free secular Bangladesh.

But according to the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey, income inequality is all-time high in the country. The top 10 percent of the wealthiest households now hold 40.92 percent of its total income.

Former and current bureaucrats, law enforcers, politicians, businesspeople and other professionals now hog the headlines for allegations of corruption.

Within six years after its founding, the word "Muslim" was dropped from party's original name. But its deal with Khelafat Majlis in 2006, its policy to appease Islamist group Hefajat-e-Islam and dropping of contents written by Hindu and freethinking writers from school textbooks following Hefajat's demands raised questions about the AL's secular character.

Party leaders always claim that no one can defeat a united AL. But the question remains how united the party actually is. In the absence of activities by opposition parties, it seems AL itself has become its main enemy.

In its 2018 electoral manifesto, the AL's two major promises were to contain price hike of essentials and take effective action against corruption. In its electoral manifesto in 2024, the party reiterated its pledge to cut the prices of commodities and keep those within an affordable range.

After forming the government in January this year for a fourth consecutive term, the AL took some initiatives to keep the prices of essentials under control, but they seem

inadequate.

According to the latest data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, food inflation surged 54 basis points to 10.76 percent from 10.22 percent while non-food inflation slipped 15 basis points to 9.19 percent from 9.34 percent in April, which is the highest rise on the Consumer Price Index in seven months.

The government's steps to check corruption did not meet people's expectations. Over the last 15 years, loan scams and indiscipline ruled the financial sector.

In its manifesto in 2008, the AL had vowed to make the wealth statements of ministers, MPs and their family members public every year, but it did not make good on the pledge. This promise was not mentioned in the three subsequent electoral manifestos.

The party had pledged to enforce laws to recover defaulted loans. However, Bangladesh Bank data shows that defaulted loans at banks hit an all-time high of Tk 1,82,295 crore at the end of March this year.

The AL had also assured the people of building a reliable electoral system. But it had to field dummy candidates in the January 7 national election to make sure the polls look participatory. It also had to refrain from fielding candidates in this year's upazila parishad elections to make sure the polls look participatory.

Due to the party's electoral strategy, AL men fought against their fellow party colleagues in the national and local elections.

And whenever any AL member is found involved in any wrongdoing, party leaders make the same old claim -- "some infiltrators from BNP-Jamaat are tainting Awami League's image".

Does the AL know who are its tested men, how many of its supporters are loyal to its core ideals and how many of them will respond to the party's call in the event of a crisis?

As AL celebrates its 75th founding anniversary, people expect that it will do justice to its name and gain strength to build a secular and democratic Bangladesh.

Bridge collapse

FROM PAGE 1

Begum, 30, and her daughter Hridi, 5, the police said.

Four others were rescued alive from the spot, said police and firefighters.

Survivors said they were en route to the wedding to be held at the bridegroom's residence in Gurdal village under Amtali upazila in a microbus from the bride's residence at Shibchar upazila.

Around 2:30 pm, the bus was crossing a bridge over a canal in the Haldia Bazar area.

"When our vehicle came to the middle of the bridge, it collapsed," said Mahub Khan, one of the survivors.

The microbus fell into the water. "The canal was filled with water hyacinth. It became senseless. Later, I found myself in a hospital bed when I regained my sense," he told The Daily Star.

On information, firefighters and police rushed to the spot and started a rescue operation with the help of locals, said Saiful Islam Sohel, a local union parishad member.

However, rescue operations were delayed due to heavy rain, said firefighters. So far, nine bodies have been retrieved and four were rescued alive, said Noor Hossain, station manager of Amtali Fire Service and Civil Defence station.

The rescue operation was suspended in the evening and will resume today, he said. Neither the bride nor the bridegroom was in the microbus.

The bridge was constructed by the Local Government Engineering Department in 2008, said Asaduzzaman Mintu Mallick, Haldia union parishad chairman.

The bridge, which was in a dilapidated condition, was not repaired, he said.

Abdullah Al Mamun, engineer of LGED's Amtali upazila office, could not be reached for comment despite repeated attempts.

Dhaka, Delhi eye shared prosperity

FROM PAGE 1

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's last-minute objections.

People in the northern part of Bangladesh have for years been suffering from floods in monsoon and water scarcity in winter.

At the joint briefing, Hasina and Modi agreed to a shared vision for the two countries as well as cooperation to make the region prosperous and stable.

Hasina said, "Today, our two sides had very productive meetings where we discussed politics and security, trade and connectivity, the sharing of water from common rivers, power and energy, and regional and multilateral cooperation, among other issues of mutual interest."

"We agreed to collaborate with each other for the betterment of our people and countries... We charted the future course of action to ensure a smart Bangladesh by following Vision 2041 and Viksit Bharat by 2047."

Modi said Bangladesh "lies at the confluence of our 'Neighbourhood First' policy, Act East Policy, Vision

SAGAR and the Indo-Pacific Vision".

Noting that the two countries completed many important projects for public welfare in the last year alone, he said, "I reiterate India's commitment to realising Bangabandhu's vision of a stable, prosperous and progressive Bangladesh."

The two leaders witnessed the signing of 10 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

It was Hasina and Modi's first bilateral meeting after the January 7 election in Bangladesh. For India, it was the first visit by the head of a foreign government after the national elections there.

Hasina's two-day visit on June 21-22 took place before her planned visit to China in early July.

RIVERS

The two countries have decided to start talks at the technical level for the renewal of the Ganges River treaty that will expire next year.

In 2020, Bangladesh requested China to support the implementation of a nearly \$1 billion Teesta River

Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project. China showed interest at the time.

The project was discussed at yesterday's meeting, Kwatra said.

There are 54 transboundary rivers between Bangladesh and India. The two countries have a water sharing treaty regarding the Ganges only.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) issued separate statements later.

The Indian statement said, "Recognising the importance of water resource management in our bilateral relationship, we will continue to engage in prioritising the exchange of data and formulating the framework for interim water sharing based on the recommendations of the Joint Rivers Commission."

MOFA in its statement said Bangladesh also reiterated the early conclusion of Teesta Water Sharing Treaty.

Asked about this, former ambassador M Humayun Kabir told this correspondent the idea of

conservation and management of the Teesta is fine, but ignoring the sharing of water means ignoring the fundamental rights of Bangladeshi people.

"The share of Teesta water is important as it has larger implications," he said.

OTHER MATTERS

Addressing the joint press briefing, Modi said with focus on connectivity, commerce, and collaboration in the last 10 years, the two countries restored the connectivity that existed before 1965.

"We will now focus on digital and energy connectivity even more. This will speed up the economies of both countries," he said.

Modi welcomed Bangladesh's decision to join the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. "We will also continue our cooperation in other regional and international forums."

The Indian premier said the two leaders had detailed discussions from defence production to modernisation of armed forces and decided to strengthen cooperation over counterterrorism, fundamentalism and peaceful management of the border.

The MEA statement said both the countries will explore defence industrial cooperation for modernisation of the Armed Forces of Bangladesh, to strengthen its capability for defence, and work closely for military engagements of exercises, training and capability development.

As part of sub-regional connectivity initiatives, India will extend transit facilities for movement of Bangladesh goods to Nepal and Bhutan through railway network, it added.

India will continue to expand power and energy collaboration and the countries will together develop intra-regional electricity trade, including competitively-priced power generated from clean energy projects in India, Nepal and Bhutan, through the Indian electricity grid.

"Based on availability and to the best of its abilities, India will also support Bangladesh with supply of essential commodities."

Describing India as Bangladesh's major neighbour, trusted friend, and regional partner, Hasina said Bangladesh greatly values the relations with India.

She recalled with gratitude India's contribution to Bangladesh's independence.

Hasina invited Modi to visit Bangladesh.

She also called on Indian President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar in New Delhi before leaving for Dhaka last night.

Meanwhile, Vinay Kwatra made several announcements including the introduction of e-visa for patients from Bangladesh.

At the media briefing, he said India takes the issues of fatalities or injuries at the border with great sensitivity and it has been taking measures to ensure that the fatalities are reduced. The measures include using non-lethal weapons.

Kwatra said that the two leaders at the meeting discussed the Rohingya crisis, which affects both Bangladesh and Myanmar. India offered assistance in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

He said the two countries agreed to commence negotiation on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement that will include the issues of tariff, inclusion of new goods and services in trading.

M Humayun Kabir told The Daily Star that it was not clear what the framework for Bangladesh to join India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative would be.



Dr Matiur Rahman



Laila Kaniz Lucky

Top left, the Wonder Park and Eco Resort in Narsingdi where Lucky and her family members have stakes. Left, a road in Narsingdi named after Lucky which leads to their mansion.

PHOTO: STAR

How Lucky got so lucky!

FROM PAGE 1

The affidavit also does not mention that she is one of the co-owners of Wonder Park and Eco Resort, a sprawling green expanse with a lake, and lakeside cottages.

This newspaper contacted the eco resort and they confirmed that Lucky's children Ahmed Taufiqur Rahman and Farzana Rahman Iphita are co-owners.

The eco resort took over certain sections of land from a community graveyard that lies adjacent to it, Altaf Hossain, a local union parishad member, told the newspaper.

The Daily Star visited the spot and located three graves inside the boundary of the eco resort.

The total value of the land of about 133.5 decimals, on which the eco resort is built, is shown at Tk 53.9 lakh figure rejected by Altaf Hossain. He said every decimal of land in the area costs about Tk 5 lakh. This puts the valuation of just the land at least Tk 6 crore.

In addition, Lucky stated in her

affidavit that she has a 5 katha Rajuk plot in Dhaka, the value of which is "only Tk 14 lakh". Depending on the location, per katha price of Rajuk plots is much higher.

She also has 155 decimals of farmland, but her affidavit did not mention the value.

Lucky first became upazila chairman uncontested after the then chairman Abdus Sadek died of cancer in December 13, 2022.

Raipura was supposed to go to polls again on May 29 this year, but the Election Commission postponed voting after a candidate died in the run-up to the election.

Lucky's affidavit also shows she owns a flat worth Tk 55 lakh in Bashundhara Residential Area, which appears to be an undervaluation.

According to property databases, the price per square feet for flats in the area is upwards of Tk 10,000, meaning even a small 1,000 square feet apartment would cost more than Tk one crore.

In addition, Lucky owns four flats

in Sheltech Bithika, a condominium in Mirpur -- the combined value of which was shown at Tk 1.6 crore.

A floor plan obtained from the real estate project's website shows that the flats are 1,525 square feet each, and according to property listings, the price per square feet is Tk 6,850. This puts the total value of the four flats at Tk 4.18 crore -- about four times the amount stated.

A glaring example such undervaluation is the value of her furniture shown in her tax files -- just Tk 75,000.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Lucky said that she and her family are being victimised out of jealousy.

"We're very upset about the events that are unfolding. We're innocent people. Efforts are underway to frame us by dishing out lies along with some truths. My husband did well in his job. Those who are jealous of his professional success have hatched a conspiracy to accuse him of corruption. I don't want to say more."