

Anchored launch gutted in fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Barishal

A fire broke out on board the MV Saimun-1, a local launch, while it was anchored at Patarhat Launch Terminal in Mehendiganj, Barishal early yesterday.

"The vessel has been completely gutted. Fortunately, there were no casualties. The cause of the fire remains unclear," said Md Jahangir Alam, officer-in-charge of Mehendiganj Police Station, confirming the incident.

The launch, which operated on the Barishal-Mehendiganj route, caught fire around 3:00am.

Firefighters, along with locals, managed to bring the blaze under control after a prolonged effort.

A preliminary investigation by the Fire Service and Civil Defence suggests that the fire was likely caused by a mosquito coil, said Selim Reza, an official of Barishal River Port.



Sylhet's renowned Bholaganj Sadapather tourist spot now stands deserted as tourist numbers dwindle during Ramadan. Traders, hoping for a post-Eid surge, eagerly await the holiday season to revive their businesses. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Lemon prices soar amid Ramadan demand

S DILIP ROY

Since the beginning of Ramadan, the price of lemons has soared in the market, bringing unexpected profits for farmers. Farmers and vegetable sellers predict that prices will remain high until the first week of April due to strong market demand.

Currently, small sized lemons are selling for Tk 14-15 each, medium-sized ones for Tk 16-17, and large ones for Tk 18-20 in the local market. Farmers are selling lemons directly from the fields for Tk 10-12 apiece.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), there are 2.25 lakh lemon trees in 650 gardens covering around 900 bighas of land across five districts in the Rangpur region – Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Rangpur, Nilphamari, and Gaibandha.

These gardens produce lemons commercially, while most rural farmers also grow four to ten trees in their homesteads. Each tree yields 400-1,000 lemons, with production continuing year-round. Lemons reach maturity within three months



of budding.

Ahsanul Kabir Bulu, a farmer from Kashipur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, said he has been harvesting 350-400 lemons daily since the beginning of Ramadan.

Vegetable sellers from various areas are purchasing lemons from his garden at Tk 10-12 each, he said.

Badiar Rahman, a farmer from Singardabri village in Rajarhat upazila of Kurigram, said the lemon yield is lower in March, with only 20-25 percent of the usual harvest available. He is earning Tk 4,000-5,000 daily from his one-and-a-half bigha orchard.

In previous years, prices were much lower. The full lemon season will begin in April, when prices are expected to drop to Tk 2-3 per piece.

Chandramohan Das, a farmer from Tepa Madhupur village in Kaunia upazila of Rangpur, has six

lemon trees in his homestead, which usually meet his family's needs.

However, with the high prices this year, he has started selling his lemons and plans to cultivate them commercially on 20 decimals of land.

Abdus Salam, a vegetable seller at Goshala Bazaar in Lalmonirhat town, said market supply remains low while demand is high, causing prices to rise.

However, the availability of local lemons is expected to improve within a week.

Shafiqul Islam, additional director of the Rangpur Regional DAE, said demand for lemons has increased for Ramadan. Since there is a year-round demand, farmers face no difficulties in selling their produce.

However, the low yield in March has reduced supply, leading to the current price surge, he added.

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Make TNZ pay our wages

FROM PAGE 3

-- "Some will eat while others starve; this can't happen" and "Three months' wages unpaid, yet the government remains silent."

Before the march, workers held a press conference in front of Shromo Bhaban, revealing they were owed Tk 17.78 crore in unpaid wages, bonuses, and allowances. Only Tk 1.05 crore had been paid on March 27.

They accused Labour Adviser M Sakhawat Hossain of spreading misinformation.

On March 27, Sakhawat claimed that owner Shariful Islam Shahid had sold his car to pay off the arrears. A statement was also circulated to journalists by the Information Directorate.

However, workers said only half of one month's salary had been paid, while they were still owed three months' wages, Eid bonuses, and holiday allowances.

"There are over four thousand workers whose wages are due. Is it possible to pay all of it just by selling a car? Do they think us poor workers to be fools?" said worker Sharif.

On March 23, after demonstrating in front of their factories in Gazipur,

workers moved to the BGMEA office in Dhaka and then to the Department of Labour. They have been lying on the ground in front of the main gate, denied even basic washroom facilities.

These workers have endured blistering summer heat during the day, and at night, mosquito infestations have left them sleep-deprived.

Many have collapsed from dehydration and exhaustion. After yesterday's procession, one worker was rushed to DMCH after fainting.

Female workers, in particular, have faced dire conditions.

With no access to toilets, they have been forced to limit their food and water intake, worsening their health.

Most are fasting during Ramadan, breaking their fast with whatever little they can – often just puffed rice and chickpeas donated by sympathisers.

Shefali Akter shared her distress -- "I have two children. Their education has stopped. I can't even buy food for them. Starvation is looming."

On March 25, police charged batons at workers as they attempted to march

towards the Secretariat.

Yesterday evening, factory owners communicated that all arrears would be paid by today, claimed workers. However, workers refused to end their movement without receiving actual payments.

"They gave us similar dates before. They said our arrears would be paid by March 27. Now they say it will be paid tomorrow [today]. We don't believe them. We'll leave only after we get full payment," said Md Shahidul Islam, a protesting worker.

If their demands remain unmet, workers plan to submit a memorandum to the chief adviser.

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3 cops detained

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of Tk 20 lakh, later settling for Tk 10 lakh, of which Tk 4 lakh was paid to them through mobile banking.

When the kidnappers reached Damudya Bus Stand to collect the remaining Tk 6 lakh, the victims started screaming for help.

Hearing their screams, locals intervened, detained some of the abductors, and beat them.

Later, Damudya Police arrived and rescued the perpetrators. Four of the kidnappers, including one police officer named Joy Poddar, managed to

seized rice was indeed under the Food-Friendly Programme," he said.

"Sometime, beneficiaries sell the rice after receiving it," he added.

Upazila Food Controller Khandaker Abul Kalam said a total of 550 sacks, each containing 30kg of rice, were allocated under the Food-Friendly Programme at Tk 15 per kg for distribution among the poor. Of these, 69 sacks were reportedly seized.

"We are first investigating whether the

escape, while the rest were detained.

The detainees are Koushik Ahmed Setu, 30, Kawsar Talukder, 29, Rubayet Mir, 27, and Sharif Hossain, 35.

Shariatpur Police Superintendent Mohammad Nazrul Islam confirmed the arrests. The four injured kidnappers are being treated at Shariatpur Sadar Hospital under police supervision.

After the arrest, one of the detainees, Rubayet Mir, said Kawsar Talukder led the operation and the ransom money was handed over to him.

Swechchhasebak Dal

FROM PAGE 3

"Since the people caught one of the criminals red-handed this time, we demand justice after a proper investigation," they said.

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The slow death

FROM PAGE 3

Meanwhile, the Nazirabazar Homeopathy Charitable Dispensary has already shut down following the retirement of both its doctor and compounder. The remaining four clinics are expected to meet the same fate.

GRADUAL DECLINE IN SUPPORT

Following the 2011 division of Dhaka City Corporation, these homeopathy dispensaries came under DSCC's jurisdiction, while Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has none.

Despite serving approximately 20,000 patients annually, DSCC's health department has done little to promote them.

These centres provide treatment for a wide range of ailments through homeopathic medicine -- except for surgeries.

Each clinic operates with one homeopathy doctor and one compounder (doctor's assistant). DSCC supplies 28 types of medicines, but budget shortages prevent adequate stock. As a result, patients often have to purchase additional medicines externally.

In 2016, DSCC eliminated all positions related to homeopathy clinics under its new health department structure.

Doctors and compounders were informed that their clinics would operate only until their retirement, with no new hires to replace them.

Tanvir said despite the horrors, he was impressed by the integrity of the nurses at the hospital who were supporting the patients, especially the children, with utmost care.

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