

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 Sadapathar 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

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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 Bazar 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.

A narrow escape

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he saw things falling around him, and the building was shaking.

"The computers and other equipment were falling down, crashing into one another, and the lift was shaking. Glass from the exterior of the building was breaking and falling apart," Tanvir said.

Nurses rushed to take care of patients and tried to protect children by holding them and creating a human shield over their heads.

"We also came out of the hospital amid the earthquake the way people survive earthquakes in the movies. Believe it or not..."

He saw many patients stranded in the lifts and had no idea if rescuers could reach all of them.

"I talked to many Thai people here, but they said they had never experienced such a powerful earthquake," Tanvir said.

Bangkok city authorities reported that 10 people were killed, 16 injured, and 101 were missing from three construction sites, including the high-rise.

The 7.7 magnitude quake struck at midday, with its epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city.

Aftershocks followed, one of which measured a strong 6.4 magnitude.

Thailand is a popular tourist destination for many Bangladeshis, who often go there for medical treatment, and the number of patients

has been increasing amid the reduction of Indian visas since the middle of last year.

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.

"One of the nurses said they as nurses have a responsibility to save the children first," Tanvir recalled. He spoke to some Bangladeshis after returning to his hotel but found no information on whether any Bangladeshis were hurt.

"As of now, the Thai authorities said 90 people were missing. We have no idea if there are any Bangladeshis among them," he told this correspondent.

If there's no

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years... The killings that took place during the July uprising... If we move towards an election without holding trials, there is no guarantee that the trial process will continue after the election."

"We want to proceed with the trial process within a quick time and then move forward. We are already witnessing attempts to sideline discussions on reforms. On behalf of NCP, we call upon everyone to unite in support of reforms," he said.

The slow death

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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.

This policy has already led to the closure of the Nazirabazar clinic. The clinic's doctor retired eight years ago, leaving the compounder to manage operations alone. When Md Sharif, the last remaining staff member, retired in 2023, the clinic shut

down without any official announcement.

Before finalising its annual budget, DSCC receives proposals to increase funding for homeopathy clinics, but these requests are routinely ignored. The budget for purchasing homeopathic medicines has been reduced to just Tk 2 lakh per year.

This correspondent visited two of the four remaining homeopathy clinics to assess their condition.

The Rakanpur Homeopathy Dispensary, hidden among coaching centres on the third floor of Lakshmi Bazar DIT Market, is barely recognisable as a medical facility.

Dr Muhammad Sharif Hossain, the homeopathy doctor at Rakanpur, said, "These clinics provide free homeopathy treatment and medicine, yet DSCC officials show no interest in them. Previously, the budget was Tk 10 lakh per year, but now, all four clinics together receive just Tk 2 lakh -- far from enough to procure sufficient medicines."

WHAT DSCC SAYS

Dr Nishat Parveen, the acting chief health officer of DSCC, confirmed that these homeopathy clinics will gradually close.

Speaking to The Daily Star, she said, "According to the new organisational structure, once the current doctors retire, their positions will not be refilled, and the dispensaries will close. We are not shutting them down deliberately -- it's a matter of policy. The 1990 organisational structure included these positions, but in 2016, they were removed. As a result, the clinics will phase out, and we must follow the approved structure."

Dec, June or March?

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"Some say the movement was only about elections? But the movement happened because the elections were not fair," he said.

"When political parties are demanding a specific election timeframe to avoid unnecessary delays, sometimes, we hear December, other times March, and then June -- such pendulum-like statements are being made by the interim government. The nation needs a specific election date to reassure this uncertainty," he added.

The BNP leader also raised concerns about garment workers' unpaid wages.

"Why have workers from 122 garment factories still not received their salaries? It's a big question. And why

have nearly fifty factories failed to pay bonuses?" he asked.

Rizvi criticised the government's inaction, saying, "The government should act as a liaison between factory owners and workers. It is their responsibility. If a worker goes without food, if they don't get paid before Eid, how can their families celebrate? The government should have ensured this."

Speaking at the same event, BNP leader Ishraque Hossain said, "After nearly five years of legal battle, I have finally received the verdict. This brought me justice. Some people, due to a lack of understanding, are reacting negatively on social media and elsewhere. They simply lack the necessary information," he said.

Make TNZ pay our wages

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-- "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 Shahin 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 Akhter 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.

280 arrested

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Furthermore, the lawmen also recovered passports, stolen mobile phones, tablets, SIM cards, jewelry, boats, motorcycles, trucks, dredgers, excavators, dumpers, and large sums of cash.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Army has also been conducting special patrols to ensure smooth traffic flow during the upcoming Eid celebrations and to prevent black market ticket sales.

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

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

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

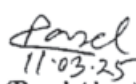
Upazila Food Controller Khandaker Abul Kalam said a total of 550 sacks, each containing 30kg of rice, were allocated under the Food-Friendly Programme at Tk 15 per kg for distribution among the poor. Of these, 69 sacks were reportedly seized.

"We are first investigating whether the

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

"Sometimes, beneficiaries sell the rice after receiving it," he added. "If the local dealer is found guilty, the department will take legal action."

SI Sumon Roy said police have asked the people who detained Aminul to file a case. "If they do not agree, we will submit the matter before the court. The next course of action will be taken as per the court's instructions," he added.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Works Manager (Diesel) Bangladesh Railway, Dhaka. www.railway.gov.bd			
Memo No: BR/WDD/FY25/eGP/Advertisement-2		Date: March 11, 2025	
e-GP Tender Notice			
e-GP Tender is invited in National e-GP Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the goods and related services / works and physical services mentioned below:			
SL No.	Tender ID	Package Description	Tender Closing/Opening Date & Time
1	1086437	Procurement of (1) Magnet valve (power contact) = 20 Nos, (2) Triangular plate = 20 Nos, (3) Magnet valve = 10 Nos, (4) Spider for magnet valve = 30 Nos and (5) Pressure switch (90-250 psi) = 15 Nos.	27-Mar-2025 11:00:00 AM
2	1086526	Procurement of (1) OSC-9 [I/N: 17-19900, P/N: 3D431944A] = 6 Nos. and (2) OSC-10 [I/N: 17-02960, P/N: 3D432213A(1/2)] = 6 Nos.	27-Mar-2025 11:10:00 AM
3	1086561	Procurement of (1) MVCC = 15 Nos., (2) CCS (110-120 psi) = 8 Nos., (3) 4 k ohms (TRR) = 20 Nos., (4) 5 k ohms (TRR) = 20 Nos., (5) 0-2500 ohms Rheostat = 5 Nos., (6) Contact FS = 5 Nos., (7) Contact Post (ST) = 5 Nos., (8) Contact Move (FS) = 5 Nos., (9) Contact Move (ST) = 5 Nos., (10) Oil seal = 10 Nos. and (11) Rheostat Assembly = 5 Nos.	27-Mar-2025 11:20:00 AM
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All potential and interested tenderers are requested to register in national e-GP system.			
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GD-813			