

## Indonesia ferry fire kills five as hundreds rescued

AFP, Jakarta

An Indonesian ferry fire killed at least five people yesterday, the country's coast guard said, while more than 200 others were saved with many jumping overboard to flee the huge blaze.

The KM Barcelona 5 ferry was engulfed in flames off the coast of Sulawesi island, Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency said, just weeks after at least 19 people were killed when a ferry sank off the popular resort island of Bali.

"Five people were reported dead, two of whom have yet to be identified. Meanwhile, 284 people have been evacuated safely," the agency, also known as Bakamla, said in a statement.

The fire broke out at the ferry's stern as it was on its way to Manado, the capital of North Sulawesi province, with some passengers jumping overboard with life jackets, the statement said.

Fishermen also helped evacuate the victims to nearby islands, the statement added. Those injured were taken to the nearest health facility, Bakamla added.

The accident happened about one hour away from the resort town of Likupang, in the northern tip of Sulawesi, Manado search and rescue agency head, George Leo Mercy Randang, told AFP.

A video released by the Manado agency showed a Bakamla vessel spraying water on the ferry, which was still emitting thin black smoke.

"What is important is that we are prioritising rescue before nightfall," George told AFP, without confirming the total number of people who were on board the ferry.

Neither he nor Bakamla gave a cause for the fire.

## ON THIS DAY LAST YEAR

### 2nd day of curfew, clashes continue

FROM PAGE 1

also confirmed that six others, who had been wounded in earlier violence, succumbed to their injuries. With these deaths, the total toll rose to at least 140 since July 16.

Most fatalities were caused by gunshot wounds. The previous night, the government extended the nationwide curfew until further notice in an attempt to curb the ongoing unrest over the quota reform protests.

In the capital, clashes erupted in Signboard, Chittagong Road, Shanarpur, and Dhania areas when law enforcers attempted to clear the Dhaka-Chittagong highway. Witnesses said police and Rab personnel opened fire indiscriminately. By 5:00pm, joint forces managed to clear the roadblocks and reopen the highway. DMCH confirmed the arrival of five bodies and admitted over 70 injured from the affected areas -- many with bullet wounds.

In Bashundhara, confrontations occurred throughout the day between police and several hundred protesters at the main gate on Pragati Sarani.

In Mirpur, a group of agitators vandalised four Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited vehicles near the Metro Rail Station at Mirpur-10 around 3:30pm. Around 15 attackers targeted the vehicles during an inspection by officials.

Elsewhere, two were killed and at least 22 injured in Narayanganj and Narsingdi.

In Narayanganj, an unidentified youth was brought dead to the 300-bed hospital in the morning. Eleven more with bullet wounds were admitted. Seven others, including a critically injured 16-year-old, were taken to a private facility in the Signboard area.

In Narsingdi, an unidentified 18-year-old was brought dead to the Sadar Hospital in the afternoon. Doctors suspected rubber bullets as the cause.



A father wailing in agony as he rushes his bullet-hit son to a hospital in Matuail, Dhaka, on the afternoon of July 21, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Throughout the day, agitators tried to block the Dhaka-Aricha highway between Radio Colony and Genda, but police foiled their efforts.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court curtailed the quota in public service to 7 percent, down from 56 percent. The court ordered that 93 percent of civil service positions be filled based on merit. It also overturned a previous High Court judgement reinstating quotas. The law minister said a circular would be issued soon.

Later in the day, three coordinators, Nahid Islam, Sarjis Alam, and Hasnat Abdullah, suspended the shutdown programme for 48 hours, demanding withdrawal of the curfew, reopening of universities, restoration of internet services, and safety for protest coordinators.

However, other coordinators rejected the decision and reaffirmed their commitment to a nine-point demand. Allegations emerged that Nahid had

been abducted and tortured and that the suspension announcement was made under duress. Nahid later confirmed he was picked up by plainclothes men, tortured into unconsciousness, and dumped under a bridge in Purbachal.

The US State Department issued a travel advisory, warning against travel to Bangladesh due to the unrest and allowing voluntary departure of non-essential embassy staff and families.

Political reactions also poured in. Jatiya Party Chairperson GM Quader claimed the Supreme Court verdict reflected the government's will, not the students'. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir urged the government to resign, alleging it was using state media to defame the movement.

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk expressed grave concern, condemned the attacks on students, and called for an impartial investigation.

## Five-member search panel proposed

FROM PAGE 1 will become chief adviser.

As a last resort, the committee will use a ranked choice vote, with the president appointing the final candidate based on that result.

This is the fourth proposal from the commission on how to appoint the chief adviser, amid persistent deadlock. On July 13, it had proposed a 13-member search committee. Earlier suggestions included a seven-member panel and an 11-member parliamentary committee, and even a return to the retired chief justice model under the 13th amendment.

Speaking to reporters, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said, "A consensus has already formed that the judiciary should remain outside the caretaker system."

On the issue of holding multiple top positions, he said, "There is near unanimity that the prime minister and Leader of the House can be the same person, as their roles are closely linked. But debate continues on whether that person should also be party chief."

He added, "To illustrate, in the UK, the cradle of democracy, the party chief often becomes the prime minister.... But the opposite must also be allowed."

Salahuddin reiterated BNP's openness to dialogue and urged all parties to balance global norms with local realities.

Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher said his party could support a five- or seven-member search committee, but only if the chief adviser is chosen unanimously.

He warned that ranked choice voting "would open the door to negative political practices" and proposed appointing the outgoing chief justice if

the committee fails to reach consensus.

Taher supported allowing the same person to serve as prime minister and Leader of the House but not party chief, saying that would "ensure a better balance of power and allow the emergence of alternative leadership."

Ariful Islam Adib, senior joint convener of the National Citizen Party, echoed that concern. "One of the main reasons we fail to develop alternative leadership is that a single individual holds three critical roles," he said. "This not only blurs the line between state and party but extends party loyalty into institutions like the judiciary."

Regarding the caretaker system, he said his party earlier proposed a five-, seven-, or 11-member selection committee that would take nominations from the ruling, opposition, and third-largest parties. He also stressed that the judiciary must remain out of the selection process.

Prof Riaz said the commission has been discussing the formation of an upper house in parliament for several days. While there is no disagreement on establishing it, there are two differing views on the process of forming it.

"Political parties have entrusted the commission to decide on how the upper house should be formed," he noted.

A decision regarding the matter will be finalised soon, he added.

For the upper house, some parties, including the Jamaat and NCP, want a proportional representation system, in which parties gain seats in proportion to the number of votes cast for them.

Others, including the BNP and its allies, want the upper house seats to be distributed as per the proportion of seats in the lower house of parliament.

Seeking anonymity, a JU faculty member said final decisions on disciplinary actions against the students involved in attacks on July protesters last year will be made by August 4, and the election schedule will be announced the same day.

A JU committee is supposed to complete its probe into July mass uprising-related allegations against faculty members and staffers by August 31. The investigation report will be sent to the International Crimes Tribunal in early September. The polls date was set, considering all these issues, said the faculty member.

Student organisations at JU appear divided over timing of the polls.

Chhatri Dal and Gonotantrik Chhatri Sangsads insist that the Chhatri League activists involved in attacks on July protesters must be brought to justice before polls are held.

Zahir Uddin Babor, convener of JCD unit at JU, said, "The university administration has yet to bring to

the formal merger process began this month under the Bank Resolution Ordinance, but differences over Exim Bank and Social Islami Bank's inclusion have slowed progress.

Both banks have pushed back. Md Nazrul Islam Swapan, chairman of Exim Bank, said the bank's financials are stronger than those of the other institutions and that the merger decision has triggered fresh deposit withdrawals.

Md Rezaul Haque, director and former chairman of Social Islami Bank, echoed the concern, saying the bank could recover on its own and should be excluded from the merger plan.

Despite the resistance, officials at the central bank confirmed that work is underway to execute the merger under a newly created dedicated department, the Bank Restructuring and Resolution Unit.

However, one senior official at the unit, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star that the process has slowed due to the central bank's lack of prior experience with such a large-scale restructuring.

Mohammad Abdul Mannan, independent director and chairman of First Security Islami Bank, welcomed the move. "It's a good decision by the regulator," he said. "But the process should be expedited."

**MERGER SLOWED**

After the fall of the previous regime last year, the central bank has already restructured the boards of the five banks.

ICB Islamic Bank has been excluded from the merger plans due to the presence of foreign investment.

KPMG audited First Security Islami, Global Islami, and Union Bank, while Ernst & Young audited Exim Bank, Social Islami, and ICB Islamic Bank. The audit firms submitted their findings to the central bank earlier this year, and The Daily Star has reviewed copies of the reports.

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## DU, JU set for Sept polls

FROM PAGE 1

eligibility, the commission clarified that students from the 2018-19 academic session whose master's results have already been published will not be eligible to vote or contest in the DUCSU or hall union elections.

Others who will not be included in the voter list are 385 of the named DU students, among 500, in a case filed with Shahbagh Police Station over an attack on July 15 during the uprising last year. Around 126 others who were suspended based on a university probe will also not be allowed to vote.

**JAHANGIRNAGAR UNIVERSITY**

JU authorities recently announced a fresh election date -- September 11 -- after deferring the polls previously scheduled for July 31.

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Widespread panic has gripped residents in all five upazilas due to the ongoing police drives, according to local representatives and residents.

"I didn't join any procession; I wasn't involved in anything. Still, I heard that a case has been filed against me. I'm now on the run day and night. I'm even afraid to visit my children," said a resident of Jalirpari union in Muktudpur upazila, requesting anonymity.

A union parishad member from Kashiani upazila said, "At least 25-30 young men in my area have gone into hiding. Some have taken shelter at relatives' homes in other districts. There are allegations that police are conducting nighttime raids and detaining people without warrants."

"I've personally spoken to the administration and requested that no innocent person be harassed. Police say they are only arresting individuals they've identified," he added.

Moniruzzaman Mollah, chairman

book the BCL activists involved in the attacks. They still occupy seats in dormitories, and many teachers and staffers who backed them hold key posts. A fair and acceptable election is not possible under such circumstances."

On the other hand, Amartya Roy, president of JU Chhatri Union, said, "We view the deferral of polls as a calculated move. It suggests that the administration and certain student bodies don't want the election at this time. If the polls are postponed again, it will be seen as a repetition of past tactics."

**CHITTAGONG UNIVERSITY**

Following students' demands, the administration formed a committee on January 4 to draft guidelines for Chittagong University Central Students Union (CUCSU) election scheduled for July 31.

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## Govt to import

FROM PAGE 1

The government will procure high-quality grain at competitive prices, according to the statement.

In recent government purchases, wheat was priced at \$270 per tonne. As per this rate, the planned imports would cost about \$200 million.

The agreement will enhance trust and trade cooperation between the two countries, ultimately benefiting both nations,