



Blinken presents new N Korea approach as G7 meets in person

Setback for Modi after loss in key West Bengal election

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MADARIPUR, Bangladesh: Relatives mourn over the body of their loved one after a speedboat packed with passengers collided with a vessel transporting sand killing at least 26 people, in Madaripur yesterday.—AFP

26 killed in Bangladesh boat tragedy

Speedboat packed with passengers collides with a transporting vessel

DHAKA: At least 26 people were killed when a speedboat packed with passengers collided with a vessel transporting sand yesterday in the latest maritime disaster to hit Bangladesh. Police said the speedboat carrying about three dozen passengers from the town of Mawa rammed into the other vessel in the Padma river as it neared the main river station in the central rural town of Shibchar.

"We have so far recovered 26 bodies including a woman. We have also rescued five injured people including three children," police official Amir Hossain said. Hossain said the bow of the passenger boat was destroyed when the speedboat smashed into the side of the transport vessel, sinking in the river in minutes. "Police, the fire brigade and army rescue teams are on the spot, conducting search and rescue work," he said.

Witness Abdur Rahman said there was a loud noise when the boats collided and the vessels then overturned. "When we rushed to the spot we found the speedboat torn into two pieces. Hundreds of villagers immediately started conducting rescue work before they were joined by police

and the fire brigade," he said.

Bangladesh is building the country's largest road and railway bridge near the accident spot and police said officers were immediately at the scene. Construction work has slowed ferry transport on the river, prompting many to take the journey on less safe speedboats, which take only about 15 minutes to make the crossing in contrast to up to two hours on safer ferries.

The government administrator of Shibchar district said up to five people were believed to be missing.

He said the driver of the speedboat would be investigated as he appeared to have hit the transport vessel, which was moored at the time. "A probe has been ordered into the accident," he said. Maritime accidents are common in Bangladesh, a delta nation crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers. Experts blame poor maintenance, lax safety standards at shipyards and overcrowding for many of the accidents.

Vessels transporting sand sit low in the water and can be hard to see in choppy conditions, particularly when light is

poor. In early April, more than 30 people died when a packed ferry with around 50 passengers hurrying home from the central city of Narayanganj ahead of an impending coronavirus lockdown collided with a larger cargo vessel.

In June last year, a ferry sank in Dhaka after it was hit from behind by another ferry, killing at least 32 people. In February 2015, at least 78 people died when an overcrowded ship collided with a cargo boat.—AFP

India nears 20m cases as Europe eyes opening up

NEW DELHI: India's total COVID-19 caseload neared 20 million and oxygen shortages exacerbated a devastating second wave yesterday, as the EU proposed new rules that could allow travellers who are fully vaccinated to enter the bloc. Cases have soared by around eight million since the end of March, with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi under growing pressure to take decisive action to reverse the surge.

Scores died over the weekend in hospitals hit by shortages that have forced clinics in the capital New Delhi to send urgent appeals for help on social media. "Oxygen is a basic requirement of a hospital and a consistent supply has not been assured. We are constantly firefighting," the head of the Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital Dr Dinesh told the Indian Express daily.

The crisis had already raised questions about whether the Indian Premier League should go ahead, though cricket authorities, who stand to lose hundreds of millions of dollars if it is halted, have insisted it is helping to raise spirits. But on Monday, the league was forced into its first coronavirus postponement this season, after two players tested positive despite the tournament's bio-secure "bubble". The match-between the Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore-was called off just hours



NEW DELHI: People register to receive a dose of COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine at a hospital in New Delhi yesterday.—AFP

before its start in Ahmedabad after Varun Chakaravarty and Sandeep Warrier became infected.

Amid severe shortages, India's federal and state authorities have been scrambling to get extra oxygen to hospitals, including by sourcing it from the steel industry and sending special "Oxygen Express" trains. International aid has also poured into the country. Germany and France this weekend sent medical equipment including oxygen-generating plants. "Out there the hospitals are full. People are sometimes dying in front of the hospitals. They have no more oxygen," German ambassador Walter J. Lindner said.

Stung by defeat in a key state-level election and a Supreme Court ruling ordering him to rectify the oxygen situation in Delhi by midnight (1830 GMT), embattled Prime Minister Modi held talks with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen yesterday.—AFP

"It is clear that this (delay) is more about the expectation of the outcomes of the elections rather than the issue of Jerusalem," Shikaki said. Fatah, which controls the Palestinian Authority based in the occupied West Bank, called the polls as part of a push to mend ties with its long-term rival Hamas, which runs Gaza.

But as the election approached, Hamas was seen as better organized than Fatah, which also faced challenges from splinter groups backed by powerful former insiders. Shikaki described Abbas's unilateral decision to postpone the votes as "very destructive." "It is not Israel who defeated the Palestinians, it is Abbas. He is the one making this decision," Shikaki said.

All Palestinian factions insist that voting be allowed in east Jerusalem, an area they claim as the capital of their future state. Some 300,000 Palestinians live in the eastern part of the Holy City, seized by Israel in the Six Day War of 1967 and later annexed—a decision not recognized by most of the international community. Hamas and other Abbas critics have said that hinging elections on whether Israel allows voting in Jerusalem gives the Jewish state an unacceptable veto over the Palestinian right to vote. Following the postponement, Hamas accused Abbas of perpetrating a "coup" against their partnership.—AFP

Palestinian vote delay threatens Abbas-Hamas ties

GAZA CITY: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's decision to indefinitely postpone elections could rekindle tensions between his secular Fatah movement and Hamas Islamists, piling pressure on Abbas to set a new timeline for a vote, experts say.

Abbas last week declared that legislative and presidential polls set for May and July respectively, which would have been the first Palestinian elections in 15 years, should not be held until Israel guaranteed voting could take place in annexed east Jerusalem.

But even before he announced the delay, Abbas' critics forecast that he might use the complex Jerusalem issue as pretext to put off a vote in which Fatah faced setbacks. Khalil Shikaki, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey research, told AFP the 85-year-old Palestinian president had now confirmed those suspicions.



Notice of Sale of the retired Assets (preserved as functional) of Shuaiba Refinery

Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) a subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, is pleased to announce the Sale of the retired assets (preserved as functional) of its de-commissioned Shuaiba Refinery, Kuwait through a sealed-bid auction Sale process.

Potential Buyers interested to participate in the Sale process are invited to access the information and download Expression of Interest file through KNPC webpage:

www.knpc.com

Potential Buyers are required to submit their responses (along with the completed and validly executed Expression of Interest form and related documentary back-ups set out in Annexure - 2 thereof) not later than 1 pm Kuwait time on 01/06/2021, to email address

SHUAssetsSale@knpc.com