

Beat: Miscellaneous

3 dead, more than 230 missing after ferry capsizes in Bangladesh

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USPA News - An overcrowded ferry carrying about 350 people capsized on a river in central Bangladesh on early Monday, killing at least three people and leaving more than 230 others missing, local authorities said. Some 100 people have been rescued alive from the water.

The MV Pinak-6 ferry departed from Mawa, near the capital Dhaka, at 11 a.m. local time and sank about 15 minutes later while it was 800 yards (730 meters) away in the channel of Lauhajong, on the Padma River. The boat, carrying some 350 people, was bound for the Kewrakandi ferry terminal which is used as a shortcut connection to Dhaka. At least 110 of those on board were either able to swim ashore or were rescued in the immediate aftermath, but as many as 238 people could still be missing. Two women were among three bodies recovered from the water, but their identities were still unknown, although they are believed to be between the ages of 25 and 30. Rescuers used 'Site Scanner Sonar' technology to detect the wreckage of the ship, which was only found at around 8 p.m., some four hours after the navy, fire service and coast guards began a large-scale rescue operation. In addition, a rescue vessel named 'Rutam' and a chopper were added to the equipment being used in the operation. Divers from the fire service and the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) initially tried to search the ferry, but rough currents and strong winds prevented them from going through with the operation, state-run media reported. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ordered all concerned to do everything possible with the highest priority to rescue those who were on board the Pinak-6 ferry, the country's national news agency BSS reported. He prompted the Bangladesh Army, Navy, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Coast Guard, Fire Brigade and BIWTA to immediately respond to the situation. There were conflicting reports throughout the day about the number of people on board the ferry, but officials said late Monday that they believed the actual number to be around 350. The names of at least 120 missing people had been reported to authorities, and efforts were underway to identify the others. Police said the boat was designed to carry a maximum of 150 passengers, and investigators believe overloading in combination with the bad weather was likely the cause of the capsizing. Ferry and boat accidents happen frequently in Bangladesh, a low-lying delta nation that is criss-crossed by more than 250 rivers. In March 2012, at least 147 people were killed when a Dhaka-bound ferry capsized after being struck by a cargo vessel on the Meghna River in central Bangladesh.

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