

At least 30 die in Bangladesh ferry accident

● The Morning Bird vessel was hit from behind by another ferry

AFP | Dhaka

At least 30 people died and a dozen are missing after a ferry capsized and sank Monday in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka following a collision with another vessel, rescue officials said.

The Morning Bird vessel was hit from behind by another ferry around 9:30 am local time (0330 GMT) during the morning rush hour, when the country's largest river port is packed with vessels.

"We have collected 30 bodies, including 20 males, seven women and three children," Abul Khair, a diver in the fire brigade, said.

"There were at least 50 people on board... Our rescue divers are still searching," coastguard spokesman commander Hayet Ibne Siddique said.

The ferry -- which departed from central Munshiganj district -- sank as it was about to moor at Sadarghat, Dhaka's main river port used by hundreds of boats to travel to the country's south.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority's chief, Commodore Golam Sadeq, said the single-deck ship was "not overcrowded" and sank "due to



Divers were still pulling bodies from the wreck, with the deceased placed in body-bags and then laid in rows at the harbour-front



Boat accidents are common in Bangladesh, which is crisscrossed by more than 230 rivers. The South Asian nation is heavily reliant on ferries for transport but has had a poor safety record.

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He said the vessel had been cleared to carry passengers until September.

Witnesses told local television stations many passengers appeared to be stuck in the ferry's

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cabins.

Divers were still pulling bodies from the wreck, in waters some 40-50 feet (12-15 metres) deep. The deceased were put in body-bags before they were laid in rows at the harbour-front.

Another boat would later arrive to lift the damaged vessel from the water, Siddique said.

Relatives gathered at Sadarghat despite coronavirus social distancing concerns to search for their family.

"I still don't know what happened to them," a man, searching for his cousin and another relative, told reporters.

Experts blame badly maintained vessels, lax safety standards at shipyards and overcrowding for many of the accidents.

In February 2015 at least 78 people died when an overcrowded ship collided with a cargo boat in a central Bangladesh river.

The number of accidents has dropped sharply in recent years as authorities crackdown on unseaworthy vessels.

Six killed in attack on Pakistan Stock Exchange

● Four security guards, a police officer and a bystander were killed in the melee

● The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) later claimed responsibility in a message

● Last year, the US State Department designated the BLA as a global terrorist group

AFP | Karachi

Baloch separatists opened fire and hurled a grenade at the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi Monday, authorities said, killing six people including a policeman.

Four security guards, a police officer and a bystander were killed in the melee, while local police chief Ghulam Nabi Memon said all four assailants were also dead.

"Police have recovered modern automatic weapons and explosive materials from the terrorists," Karachi police said in a statement.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) later claimed responsibility in a message sent to AFP, saying an elite unit of fighters had carried out the assault.

The separatists have carried out a string of high-profile attacks across the country in recent years -- including in the



Paramilitary soldiers patrol near the Pakistan Stock Exchange building in Karachi following an attack by Baloch separatists



Karachi was once a hotspot for crime and violence

southern port city.

The BLA is one of several insurgent groups fighting primar-

ily in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province, which has been rocked by separatist,

Islamist and sectarian violence for years.

The group has targeted infrastructure projects and Chinese workers in Pakistan multiple times in recent years, including during a brazen daylight attack on Beijing's consulate in Karachi which killed four people in 2018.

In May last year, the BLA attacked a luxury hotel near the Afghan border at Gwadar, where a port development is the flagship project of a multi-billion dollar national infrastructure project funded by China.

Last year, the US State Department designated the BLA as a global terrorist group, making it a crime for anyone in the United States to assist the militants and freezing any US assets they may

Pakistan Stock Exchange attack



have.

Following Monday's attack Pakistani authorities vowed to strike back against any group found responsible for the onslaught, promising to dismantle their networks and destroy their bases.

Violent history

"An investigation has been launched and very soon we will reach their masterminds," interior minister Ijaz Ahmad Shah said in a video message posted after the attack.

Business continued as usual at the Karachi stock exchange after the attack.

"Trading is smooth and continuing. PSX benchmark index one of the Best Performer in Asia today so far," tweeted Mohammed Sohail, a broker at the exchange.

For a while after the attack the

bodies of at least two gunmen could be seen in a pool of blood near the exchange.

Karachi was once a hotspot for crime and violence, with heavily armed groups tied to politicians frequently gunning down opponents and launching attacks on residential areas.

But the situation has largely stabilised in recent years following operations by security agencies against armed political outfits and Islamist militants.

Militant groups still retain the ability to launch periodic attacks in many rural areas and occasionally in urban centres.

Monday's attack comes more than a week after a grenade was thrown at a line of people waiting outside a government welfare office in the city, killing one and injuring eight others, according to a statement from municipal authorities.