



A villager, left, on the Meghna bank points to the spot midriver where a launch capsized with about 750 passengers aboard Tuesday; men and women, middle, scour the river for their relatives feared drowned; and people from outlying areas wait for their near and dear ones.

Bloated bodies float downstream

Chances of survivors, salvaging sunken launch remote

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bloated bodies floated downstream the Meghna yesterday, two days after an overcrowded launch capsized in the Chandpur confluence after being sucked into a whirlpool on Tuesday night.

Driving rain and fierce currents in the confluence of the Padma, Meghna, and Dakatia rivers hobbled

all attempts by searchers to trace the triple-decker MV Nasrin-1.

BODIES FLOATING

Our Barisal correspondent adds: people saw 14 bodies and belongings of the drowned floating in the treacherous Meghna waters downstream Chandpur, but could not retrieve those due to the currents.

rents.

Witnesses at Chandpur said they saw two bodies in the confluence early yesterday.

"After floating for a fleeting moment, the bodies went underwater," said Khorsheed, whose son Helal, 14, is feared drowned in the accident.

Khorsheed, a rickshawpuller, has

been keeping a round-the-clock vigil sitting on the Meghna shore since the incident in the hope of finding his son.

According to the upazila nirbahi officer and municipal chairman of Lalmohon, four bodies were seen at Daulatkhan, four at Borhanuddin, two at Ramgati and one each at Haimchar and Ilisha. Others reported the rest.

Death count a mystery

Four bodies have so far been retrieved following the sinking seen as the biggest ever launch accident in Bangladesh.

The body of an aged man was retrieved from the Meghna near the accident site yesterday. Earlier

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Mandatory insurance plan for riders falls flat as govt gives in to launch owners

RAFIQ HASAN

The government has abandoned its mandatory life insurance plan for marine passengers in the face of opposition by launch owners.

Instead, it introduced a welfare fund on July 1 for passengers killed or injured in launch accidents, shipping ministry sources said.

"The proposed mandatory life insurance for launch passengers was abandoned as launch owners pressed for a number of provisions, which go in favour of them," said a top official of the shipping ministry.

Sipping Minister Akbar Hossain also admitted that life insurance for launch passenger could not be introduced because of non-cooperation by launch owners.

Chairman of Bangladesh Launch Owners Association Kalimullah could not be contacted for his comment.

A trustee board headed by the chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has been formed to run the fund and compensate launch mishap victims.

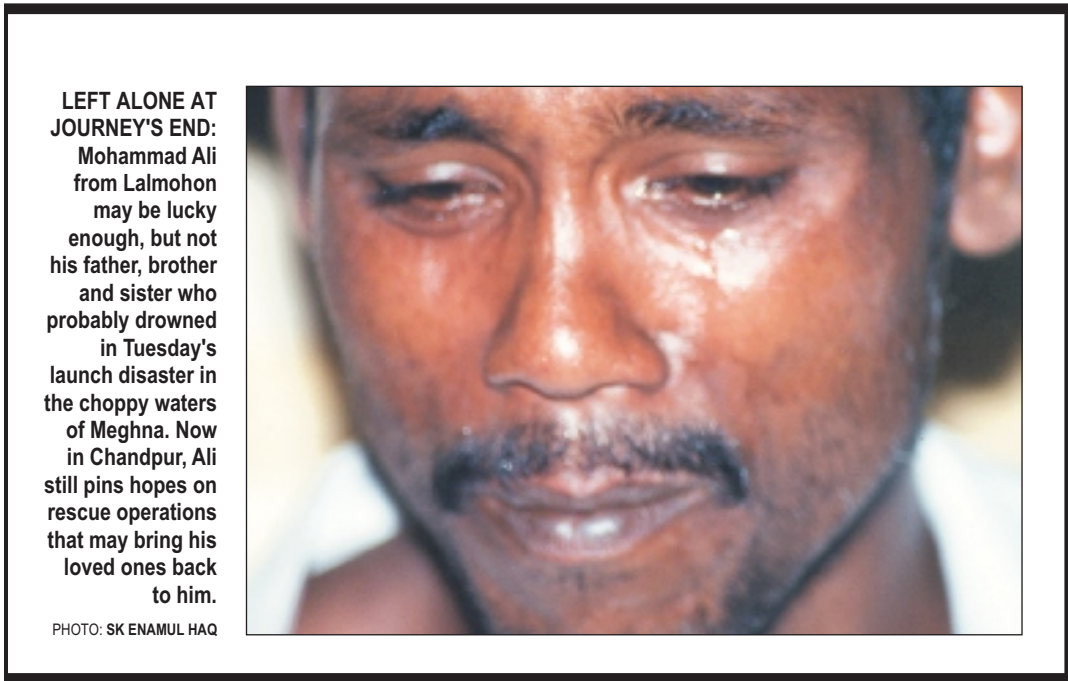
However, the amount of com

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Year-wise disaster at a glance

| Year | Number of Accidents | Death |
|------|---------------------|-------|
| 1977 | 05 | 29 |
| 1978 | 07 | 20 |
| 1979 | 08 | 73 |
| 1980 | 01 | 04 |
| 1981 | 03 | 20 |
| 1982 | 02 | NIL |
| 1983 | 03 | 29 |
| 1984 | 05 | 41 |
| 1985 | 12 | 80 |
| 1986 | 11 | 426 |
| 1987 | 11 | 51 |
| 1988 | 11 | 108 |
| 1989 | 05 | 32 |
| 1990 | 13 | 168 |
| 1991 | 11 | 19 |
| 1992 | 17 | 05 |
| 1993 | 24 | 183 |
| 1994 | 27 | 303 |
| 1995 | 19 | 40 |
| 1996 | 20 | 147 |
| 1997 | 11 | 104 |
| 1998 | 10 | 140 |
| 1999 | 06 | 141 |
| 2000 | 08 | 387 |
| 2001 | 01 | 9 |
| 2002 | 02 | 480 |
| 2003 | 04 | 208 |
| | Total | 3247 |

STAR GRAPHICS



LEFT ALONE AT JOURNEY'S END: Mohammad Ali from Lalmohon may be lucky enough, but not his father, brother and sister who probably drowned in Tuesday's launch disaster in the choppy waters of Meghna. Now in Chandpur, Ali still pins hopes on rescue operations that may bring his loved ones back to him.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

No reason to resign: Akbar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain yesterday denied flat out any possibility of his resignation over Tuesday's triple-deck launch capsizing in which about 530 passengers were feared drowned.

"I am not a person to quit. If I quit, then who would work?" Akbar told The Daily Star over telephone last night.

The minister asserted that the aim of a good minister is to work and said he wants to work better.

Akbar also shrugged off the responsibility of serial launch accidents saying that all vessels

were not built during the BNP rule.

"We took action against 40 unfit launches, but the previous government did not do anything," he claimed.

"Their licences will not be renewed unless the flaws are removed," he said of the action taken by the government. He has admitted that those launches are still plying various waterways.

Asked why he did not visit the accident site of MV Nasrin-1 that sank in the Meghna near Chandpur Tuesday night, Akbar said, "I will go there after the vessel is traced. I will try my best to salvage it." He said all

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Commentary

Moves against media

Some disturbing new occurrences

MAHFUZ ANAM

Within the last three weeks warrants of arrests were issued against five editors and one executive editor on defamation charges. First, warrants were against the editors of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, then against the editor of Jugantar and finally against the editor, advisory editor and executive editor of Daily Janakantha.

In addition to the arrest warrants, defamatory and utterly false and fabricated charges were made against the editor of this newspaper from the floor of parliament. In

the second onslaught, exemplary punishment for Star editor and reporter was demanded of the Speaker for interpreting the Bangla word Bua as a maidservant which was directed at the leader of the opposition by the PM's advisor on parliamentary affairs during the latter's budget speech. The Speaker accepted the petition and sent it to the House Privileges Committee to examine and give opinion whether or not any member's privilege was breached.

Only a few days back, police went to the studios of Channel-i and ATN Bangla, two private TV

channels, within hours of broadcasting a story concerning the ammunition haul in Bogra. The story, which was also run by other newspapers, said that police recovered huge quantity of bullets and explosives from houses of both opposition and coalition activists and suspected their involvement in the affair. Following the police visit one station withdrew the story and another broadcast the same blaming the opposition in place of a coalition partner, which they did in the original version. On

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Bill on free anti-graft body placed in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed last night introduced in the Jatiya Sangsad a bill seeking to form an independent anti-corruption commission.

Earlier on Monday, the cabinet approved the Anti-Corruption Commission Bill, 2003, in a bid to deliver an election pledge of the coalition government.

The commission will impartially investigate the offences of corruption and grant sanction for trial.

The bill proposed that the commission would be comprised of three commissioners, among whom, one would be nominated as its chairman by the president.

The president will appoint the three commissioners from among

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Tragedy drives Jamal crazy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shocked with the Tuesday's tragic launch capsizing, a young man indifferent to his life, jumped into the river Dakatia near Chandpur Launch Terminal from a berthed launch yesterday to commit suicide.

A bearded man Jamal Uddin, 33, came all the way from Chandina in Comilla to Chandpur yesterday morning as he came to know about the tragic incident by watching television news on Wednesday night.

"I came here to see the situation, but I got shocked hearing the wailing of the people who lost their near and dear ones. It seemed to me that life is meaningless and I jumped into the river," a soft-spoken Jamal said. He said he does not know how to swim.

Jamal, who got married two years back and have no offspring, said he earns his livelihood by working as an agricultural labour in his village. He also said that he did not lose any of his relatives in the launch disaster.

The young man narrowly escaped drowning when a bypassing boatman Mansur Ali, who saw Jamal struggling under raging waters, moved with all his might to the spot and rescued him. Sixth among five sons and seven daughters of Baktiar Khan, Jamal said he has no problem with his family life.

PRIMARY FINDINGS

The primary findings of the investigation said wrong drive, overload

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Watery grave lies in wait in Chandpur

SHAMEEM MAHMUD

The confluence of three mighty rivers close to Chandpur town has turned into a death trap for south-bound launches, as over 1,500 passengers died in serial sinkings at the monsoon-swollen meeting point in last 10 years.

The capsizing of MV Nasrin-1 with 750 passengers aboard in the confluence Tuesday revived the memories of the launch disasters that left another 500 people missing during the same period. The 10-year count has been swelled by 50 more deaths in minor accidents.

Officials of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority yesterday claimed that they instructed the launch captains to avoid the converging waterways of the Padma, Meghna and Dakatia that

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