Meghna tragedy

During low tide the rescuers would have the vessel almost on the shore and rescue the bodies. Some searchlights were on to spot bodies

Every time personnel of the Fire Brigade, the Red Crescent or the navy picked up a bloated body from the river by and handed it over to the police under a makeshift tent at Shaitnal, relatives rushed to see if their loved ones were there.

Relatives coming to Shaitnal reported having seen scores of bloated bodies in the downstream of Shaitnal near Chandpur.

Throughout the day two small teams of divers tried to tie heavy metal ropes to the sunken vessel 50 feet deep on the riverbed. At around noon, the rescue operation came to a halt for nearly two hours when a violent storm with gusts up to the speed of 130 kilometres per hour lashed the area. In the afternoon, the divers managed to tie the heavy wire ropes to the vessel and tried to tow it towards the shore. But the metal rope snapped twice.

Hundreds of relatives of the victims converged at the spot from Dhaka and Doshmina, Baufal and Galachipa in Patuakhali. Most victims are believed to be from the three thana of Patuakhali. All the relatives and survivors this correspondent talked to said MV Salahuddin was carrying 'well over 350 passengers' and that accounts of only 92 people were available. The rest are missing and believed

At Shaitnal, hundreds of griefstricken relatives were looking for their brothers, fathers, sisters, mothers, cousins, sons, daughters, grandmothers, grandfathers. cousins in-laws nephews nieces and friends. They told stories of how some of them saw their loved ones off on Friday evening at the Sadarghat terminal.

"I saw off my niece Shakirun Akhtar, a honours student of economics at the Eden Girls' College, and my brother on Friday. The launch was so crowded that we had to hire a cabin meant for the crew, said Mosharraf Hossain Hiron, a lecturer at Shiddirgani College in

Mohammad Shahin Shikdar from Kalishuri, Baufal was still in deep shock, for he survived the capsize but his younger brother did not. Finding no seat on the top floors of the vessel at around 4:00pm on Friday, he and his ninevear old brother Shakur Shikdar found a small space near the hull where the young boy fell asleep. He said as the storm blew the canvas curtains of the vessel he saw another vessel running to its side. Then suddenly he heard a big bang.

"I do not know if the other vessel hit Salahuddin but all I could remember was I as looking for an exit from the vessel. As I reached outside I found the vessel unside down and some people were on the hull." Shahin said.

"Within ten minutes the whole vessel slowly went down, three of us grabbed a floating carom board and swum towards a vessel anchored at Shaitnal. I am still waiting to see my brother.

Renu and her daughter came to Shaitnal from Awliapur, under Dashmina thana in Patuakhali, to look for her son Mamun and her brother Juresh. Both mother and daughter wailed on the bank as rescuers brought in more bodies

Jalal also came from Dashmina to look for his son, daughter-in-law and son-in-law who were on board the vessel on Friday. The salvage operation was continuing when the

PM: Check corruption

Khaleda Zia thanked the secretaries for implementing welfare programmes and upholding the image of the government and the

country.

She also asked them to ensure discipline, check corruption and accelerate the movement of files.

The Prime Minister said her government attached top priority to poverty alleviation and programmes for female education, tree plantation, picsiculture and development

She said democracy in Bangladesh had been widely acclaimed all over the world and senior bureaucrats deserved a share of the acclaim. She referred to global economic recession and a ruined economy which the BNP-led government of four-party alliance

She said such meetings would

Siddiqui noted that the Prime Minister in her first meeting with the secretaries had laid importance on restoration of discipline in the administration, bringing dynamism in the economy and restoration of law and order. He pointed out that the Prime

Cabinet Secretary Dr Kamal

Minister had also mentioned the efforts to implement the government pledges that include poverty alleviation, curbing terrorism, removing illiteracy and ensuring national

He cited the 100-day programme of the government and mentioned the important role played by the secretaries in implementing those.

The secretaries also raised some problems with projects of their respective ministries. The Prime Minister gave a patient hearing and

both taken to the thana for interroga-A case has been filed in this

Boost for export HSC cheats FROM PAGE 1 ing in the ensuing HSC examina-

FROM PAGE 1 incentives at a press conference yesterday at the conference room of the Press Information Department

He however could not say how much funds would be needed for the new incentive package. He indicated that the necessary resources would be mobilised by saving on different heads and taxing the domestic sectors in the next budget.

"Right now. I cannot exactly say how much fund would be needed for this purpose. But we may have to arrange cash by taxing the domestic

sector," Saifur Rahman said Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury also spoke on the occasion, while State Minister for Commerce Barakatullah Bulu Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan and Commerce Secretary

Suhel Ahmed were present. Saifur also declared relocation of economic and commercial wings of

the country's foreign missions to give the much-needed boost to the The country's export earnings

fell by around US\$750 million or 15.68 per cent from the \$4780 million target during the July-February period of the current fiscal

"If the officials posted in different economic and commercial wings of the missions do not perform, they will be called back and actions will be taken against them," Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said.

The finance minister also said steps have been taken to give loans for setting up small and medium enterprises without any collateral. He promised Tk 200 crore funds Tk 100 crore from the equity fund of the Bangladesh Bank and another Tk 100 crore from different banks -- for

this purpose. "A committee comprisina finance, commerce and other relevant secretaries will scrutinise all proposals and give final consent on loan disbursement." Saifur said.

An audit firm appointed by the the textile sector demands for cash incentive. Another committee jointly headed by finance and commerce secretaries will suggest on the issue and the existing rules will be applicable for disbursement of incen-

For the unresolved cases of cash incentives in the textile sector for this fiscal, the central bank appointed audit firm, assisted by the customs department and the Bangladesh Bank, will inspect the textile mills, the finance minister

If exporters ship frozen food in retail packs, they will be entitled to

draw cash incentives of 15 per cent from July 2002 and the facility will run for the next three years. Agricultural produces and agro

Terming cheating a social malproducts will enjoy 15 per cent aise, he said it is not possible to fully export cash subsidy and in case of prevent cheating, and so efforts fresh fruits, the rate will be 20 per would be on to cut it down as much Bone dust export will receive 15 as possible. If any examinee is found carrying

per cent incentive from July 2002 to June 2005. For products made with 80 per

cent locally produced straw and sugarcane waste, the cash incen tive would be 15 per cent. But in case the local raw material

component is less than 80 per cent and above 50 per cent, the cash incentive will be to the tune of 10 per

Bicycle and light engineering product exports would receive 15 per cent incentive, but the condition applies that local value addition will have to be a minimum of 40 per

The government also readjusted interest rate on export credit and raised the foreign currency retention rate for exporters.

Interest rate on project and term loans for export-oriented industries has been fixed at nine per cent, down from the existing 10 to 12.5 er cent.

The sectors that will enjoy this lowered interest rate facility are agro-based industries (cold storage excluded), software and date pro cessing, artificial flower, frozen foods (poultry and meat), gift items, inished leather goods, jute goods iewelry and diamond cutting and polishing, oil and gas products, silkworm culture and silk industry. stuffed toys and export-oriented textile industry excepting

readymade garment. The government also reduced credit/hypothecation (without L/C or agreement) to 13 per cent from the existing 14 per cent and also reduced the LC margin to 20 per cent from the existing 25-30 per

Interest rate on working capital up to a maximum of 15 per cent of the FOB value has been proposed at seven per cent for all export sectors and the facility will be in place till June 2003. Late last year, the government fixed the rate at seven per cent for the RMG secto

Foreign currency retention rate on export receipts has been increased to 10-50 per cent from the existing 7.5-40 per cent.

The government also reduced interest rate on post-import loan against trust receipt (LTR) in case of apital machinery import for export industries to nine per cent from the existing 15 per cent.

Tremor jolts Ctg again

BSS, Ctg

The port city of Chittagong and its adjoining areas experienced a tremor with a magnitude of 4.10 in the Richter scale yesterday morn-

Officials of country's lone Geophysical observatory centre here termed it a "light category earthquake" and said this was the first such quake here this year that lasted 12 seconds.

The enicentre of the quake was some 100-kilometre off the port city. No casualty or damage, however, was reported.

MiG-29s

FROM PAGE 1

basic aircraft price of US\$11 million apiece. US\$27 million for equipment and armament and US\$9 million for training, transportation and services.

The deal required that 30 per cent of the overall cost should be paid in advance with the rest staggered over seven financial years.

The government formed a highpowered internal investigation committee to look into different aspects of the MiG-29 purchase. The body scrutinised the process of procurement of hardware, its efficacy, its actual origin and subsequent purchase of armaments

The MiG-29 purchase investigation committee, headed by BAF Director of Recruitment Group Captain Golam Kibria, included among others Group Captain Liaquat and Wing Commander Mamun Quadri.

Officials were very tight-lipped about the content of the report. Sources said the committee was more of a fact-finding body and not charged with any follow-up.

Earlier, the Bureau of Anticorruption filed an FIR (No. 35) on December 11 with the Tejgaon police station, alleging irregularities in purchase of the eight MIG-29s. In the FIR, the former prime

tary, a deputy secretary of the home ministry and a brigadier general were named.

minister, BAF chief, defence secre-

Rangs showroom FROM PAGE 12 The local guard confined inside a

Education Minister Dr

Osman Farruk told reporters at a

chits at the examination centre, they

carrying unlicensed firearms," State

Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul

the trouble-prone centres to identify

trouble mongers and examinees

will be taken against any educa-

tional institution if rampant cheating

is reported. The development

budget of such institutions will be

withdrawn and they will be excluded

Nobody including local political

leaders, student leaders and man-

aging committee members will be

allowed to enter the examination

as short-term measures against

cheating, but there would be long-

term measures including changes in

examination system, curriculum

and merit assessment system, he

teachers' commission to appoint

Mohammad Abdus Salam Pintu

called upon the students, teachers

and guardians to come forward to

Rajshahi hartal

cadres backed by police chased

pro-hartal activists at Zero Point.

The BNP cadres set fire to black

RNC mayor candidate Fazle

Hossain Badsha in a press state-

ment vesterday claimed that at least

20 RNC workers were injured in

attacks by police and BNP cadres at

at Zero Point in the evening.

Addressing the rally, the leaders of

the Committee announced that

they would stage demonstrations in

the city and nine other upazilas on

Tuesday to protest what they

off the roads. Business establish-

ments and educational institutions

remained closed during the hartal.

All kinds of motor vehicles were

termed blueprint election results.

Nagorik Committee held a rally

different parts of the city.

atop houses at

flags hoisted

teachers is under consideration.

create opinion against cheating.

A proposal for formation of a

Deputy Minister for Education

The ministry has planned these

from the Monthly Pay Order (MPO).

adopting unfair means in exams.

'Carrying chits is illegal as is

He said authorities would video

The minister said drastic actions

would be immediately expelled.

discussion yesterday.

Hoque Milon said.

room said the dacoits came and fled operate at different levels deep in a private car. inside the Sundarbans, which has Senior executive of Rangs Md. been declared a protected area Shoyeib however doubted that a where the hunting of tigers and deer private car could carry so many is prohibited under the Wildlife items. He suspected that the show-Conservation Act of 1974. room security guard Milon, 22,

One group of poachers only might have been asleep the whole hunts the animals while another group provides them logistic sup-CMP Commissioner Shahidullah port including hiring out guns for the Khan and the officer-in-charge (OC) kill. A third group maintains liaison of the Kotwali thana separately with the relevant officials and provisited the spot in the morning. The vides them the security cover. night guard and security guard were Tigers are also hunted down by

traps and baits laced with a deadly pesticide, said Khasru Chowdhury, an expert on the Sundarbans who had just returned to the capital after a long stay in the Sundarbans. He said he had seen dead dogs laced with pesticides being wrapped in polythene to be used later as bait. After digging a pit and filling it up with water, the dead dogs are put on a heap of earth by the pit. When the tiger eats the poisoned dog, the ingested pesticide, usually endrine, makes the animal thirsty and the tiger gulps down water from the pit. As the water comes into contact with the toxin inside the tiger's body, the toxin becomes active and the tiger

craft shops at the Sakura market

near Sheraton Hotel, which is

the nexus stretches all the way from

the Sundarbans to Dhaka via

Khulna City. In Khulna, a skin of the

Royal Bengal tiger (Panthera tigris

tigris) fetches USD300 (for an eight-

foot long skin) and USD200 (for a

take the risk could even buy tiger

cubs in Khulna where deals are

Dhaka, certain people in the city are

also engaged in the wildlife trade at

the Katabon market where exotic

According to experts, poachers

fish, birds and other pets are sold.

made at some posh hotels.

Reports said anyone willing to

Apart from the Sakura market in

The investigations revealed that

frequented by foreigners.

six-foot long skin).

starts to choke and finally dies. Khasru Chowdhury said this particular method of poaching has become highly popular these days. Unlike in the case of using a gun which leaves a bullet hole in the skin thereby minimising the price margin, this method ensures that the tiger skin remain intact.

Another popular device for killing tigers without damaging the skin is a kind of a trap made of a cord. A noose is formed with the cord in such a way that it tightens more and more around the tiger's neck as the entangled animal struggles to free itself. The tiger dies a slow and painful death as it suffocates.

Anisuzzaman Khan, a wildlife biologist working on the

Lost battle for royal cats Sundarbans bio-diversity project for reportedly smuggling out several the International Union for tiger skins hiding them inside his Conservation of Nature (ILICN) has brought along a sample of such a The Daily Star sources investitrap that he had seen strewn all gating the matter said the lucrative along the trails of tigers during his trade is centred round some handitwo-week stay in the Sundarbans

An Awami League team led by acting president of the party Samad Azad visits Hingala Woara Puyan Buddha Bihar in

Khasru Chowdhury, who spends a considerable time of the year in the Sundarbans, also said that deer meat is sold as a delicacy at Tk 70 per kg in all the bazaars in Khulna, Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Bagerhat and Satkhira. Some people even place advance orders to the deer hunters for wedding and other festivities where deer meat is served as a status symbol.

The fallout of this massacre has been devastating for the forest's ecological equilibrium as the deer population is steadily depleted. And on the other hand, being deprived of its natural prey animal deer, tigers are forced more and more to stray into the villages on the fringes of the Sundarbans and attack people and their livestock. At least 22 people have been killed by tigers in the past three years, forest department records show.

Apart from the shortage of previous the tiger's natural habitat is also being destroyed as poachers are also indiscriminately cut down the trees in the forest.

Recently a group of officials from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) along with Professor Ainun Nishat country representative of the IUCN flew over to the Sundarbans to get first-hand information about the situation. Dr Nishat's aerial observations coupled with the reality on the ground reported by Khasru Choudhury and Anisuzzaman Khan depict the grim picture of a disap-

pearing forest canopy. Both Choudhury and Khan have seen widespread destruction of the forest. The scene, they said, was particularly devastating on the western side of the Sundarbans which for the most part had remained untouched even in the recent past. But certain forest officials waged a campaign in the name of collecting election fund for a former minister by leaving the Sundarbans' vital resources free for poachers for easy pickings. One particular official who earned notoriety for such operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts by decimating the forests there had also been very active in the Sundarbans using the name of the minister.

Giving an example of the systematic destruction of the forest Khasru Choudhury said if a Sundar tree is detected to have the topdying disease, officials order it to be cut down. While cutting the tree down, if a branch of an adjacent tree is broken then that tree is also cut down. Such is the law of the jungle made by the keepers of the forest.

A proper estimate of the number of tigers in the Sundarbans has not been carried out for the past 20 vears or so. In 1969, a British tiger specialist Guy Mountford estimated the number of tigers roaming on the Bangladesh side of the Sundarbans to be about 300. Another study in the early seventies carried out by a specialist named Heinrich had put the number at nearly 400. Later the number was estimated to be up to

But now Choudhury and Khan believes unabated poaching over the years have cut the number down to what is was in the preindependence days Now it is up to the government to

come forward to take drastic measures to save the majestic animal. Choudhury and Khan added describing the plight of the Royal

The mighty hunters have become the hunted not only for their skin but also for their bones and other body parts. Tiger parts are highly prized in some traditional Chinese medicine practices, and therefore fetch high prices on the black market. There is a lucrative market in the Far East where tiger bones are used in the preparation of tiger balms and aphrodisiacs. The retail price of a kilogram of bones in Singapore is over 2500 pounds. With the rate of habitat loss and

the demand for the tiger skin as well as tiger parts for medicinal purposes, the prognosis for tigers does not look good. An ecological crisis is in the making and begs for urgent government intervention

Chirac

FROM PAGE 12 some used gloves as a symbolic sign of reluctance.

There were also questions as to whether a left-wing backlash in legislative elections that follow in June will rob Chirac of any real executive power by forcing him again into "cohabitation" with a leftist government.

Chirac on Monday is expected to accept the resignation of the current Socialist-led government and name a right-wing prime minister to lead his camp into the June poll.

Two weeks of national street demonstrations against the National Front leader -- including a mass turnout nationwide Wednesday that drew a total 1.3 million people -- set the scene for the strong voter participation Sunday.

But Le Pen himself hinted as he voted in his west Paris suburb of Saint-Cloud that, even if he did not win, he believed he could better the 17 per cent he garnered in the April 21 first round. "If I get less than 30 percent (of

the vote), it would be a huge disappointment," the 73-year-old former

Hag, principal of the Mercantile

Marine Department as convenor, to

Fertiliser dealers

the BFA chairman feared unless the government immediately resolved some of the serious problems the prices might go up.

Fertiliser dealers allege that they are required to pay 'extra money' while they receive their allotted fertiliser from the factories. "The staff who unload our fertiliser on trucks asked for money although thev are paid for the job by the BCIC," complained one dealer.

Besides, truckers outside the factory gates force the dealers to hire their trucks for carrying the fertiliser, said the dealers. Because of 'highway tolls' collected in the names of various transport associations and fuel price surge the fertiliser dealers have to spend more on transportation cost.

Once the consignment reaches their respective 'command area' (designated area where the fertiliser has to be marketed), the dealers have to wait for the deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) concerned and a deputy commissioner -nominated magistrate to certify that certain amount of fertiliser has been brought in for marketing.

"It is unnecessarily a timeconsuming process and to cut it short one has to spend 'speed money'," complained another dealer on condition of anonymity.

Besides, the traders also have to keep the local hoodlums using different political identities happy for a smooth business, fertiliser dealers complained.

Moreover, there has been a government embargo on the marketing of fertiliser designated for one district in another. "The embargo was enforced to check artificial crises and price hike of fertiliser. But we would like to propose to the BCIC that it lifts the embargo during lean season," the BFA chairman He explained with the end of

Boro season when demand for fertiliser was low the dealers across the country still had one and a half lakh metric tons (MT) of urea fertiliser in their stock "Unless the embargo on 'com-

mand area' was lifted at least during lean period the dealers cannot take their stock to other areas even if those are in demand of fertiliser," he The government had to import over five lakh MT of urea during the

current fiscal (2001-2002) due to

production shortage in six state-run

factories. During the first 10 months

of the fiscal, the country consumed

some 1.5 lakh MT of urea still remained in the BCIC warehouse and another 1.5 lakh MT in dealers'

Dealers estimate the country may need some 23.50 lakh MT of urea during the ensuing 2002-2003 financial year. Besides, the country's 11 million farmers might also require some 2 lakh MT of DAP (diamonium phosphate), three lakh MT of TSP (triple super phosphate), one lakh MT of SSP (singular super phosphate), three lakh MT of MOP (muratium of potash) and 20,000 MT of NPKS (mixture of nitrogen, potash, phosphate and sulphur)

Sit-in FROM PAGE 12

alleged rigging was called for as

Yesterday's sit-in coincided with the swearing-in of the newly elected DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain They also demanded resignation

of the President, the government and the chief election commissioner for their alleged bias.

The participants of the sit-in include mayoral candidates --Advocate Abed Raza, Krishak Md. Sadek, Afzalul Haq Sikdar, Amanullah Sikdar. Shamsul Haq Jehadi and Syed Motahar Hossain,

Other defeated candidates who expressed solidarity with the demonstration are Noorjahan Taleb Munshi, Mostafa Allama, Mahbub Alam Chowdhury, Md Shahin, Advocate Abdul Baset, Kamrul Hasan and Syed Noor.

Dulu murder

FROM PAGE 12 passed the order when Habibur

Rahman Habi, brother of Dulu, sterday filed a case with the court. Waj Nabi Dulu, an AL worker, was stabbed by some BNP cadres

in the evening of April 27. He was taken to RMCH where he succumbed to his injuries at about 8

Police picked up Dulu's father Nader Ali Sheikh from RMCH the same night and took him to Boalia thana. They compelled Nader Ali to lodge a case with the thana accusing only one person.

Being suspicious of police's role, Dulu's brother Habi lodged the case with the CMM's Court, accusing 14 persons. The accused persons are Md. Azanur, Aminul Íslam, Mahatab, Rabi, Bachhu Biswas, Alam, Abdus Sattar, Rana, Md. Faruk, Shafiq, Zakirul, Rashed

Azad: Monk murder

EPONT PAGE 12 case under the supervision of the Supreme Court.

He also demanded resignation of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for her "failure" to check continued crimes against humanity in the

along with some central and local AL aders including lawmaker ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury visited the Buddhist temple cum orphanage at Hingala and consoled the family members of the monk and inmates of the orphanage. He also addressed a protest rally there.

At the rally, the AL president also criticised Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan who hails from Chittagong.

Referring to the home minister's 'unique group photo' with some 'listed criminals' published in different newspapers, Samad Azad said." Our home minister being surrounded by Santrashees (criminals), spoke against Santrash (crime) and Santrashee! This is not only ludicrous but also a clear bluff just for cheap political gain and public eye-wash.

Samad Azad said killings of orincipal Gopal Krishna Muhuri in Chittagong city, Hindu priest Madan Gopal Goshwami in Manikchhari Sunil Sandhu in Mirersarai, Bakul Rani Dey in Farhadahad (Hathazari) and Gyanojoti in Raozan are not isolated incidents.

"These are pre-planned killings by mercenary killers as per directive

forces and vested quarters in the four-party alliance government," he

The BNP-led government has been trying hard to conceal the real motives behind the killings and to save the criminals by concealing facts, he said.

your (that leader's) area today. Raozan is not in an orderly state for long. Please bring back peace and order here, do positive work and help ensure safety to people and their property. In return, we promise to welcome you and stand beside

Preseded over by Dr. Jinobodhi

Samad Azad announced a donation of Tk 50,000 from his party fund for the orphanage.

Earlier, the AL leaders placed wreaths at the site where monk Gyanojoti Mohasthabir was cre-

To a question, he said he would

work for an effective co-ordination

among all the service organisations

in the capital to ensure better ser-

vice to the people. "I shall try for an

effective co-ordination, either by

setting up a metropolitan govern-

ment or by any other means," he

said and sought cooperation of all

between the DCC and other service

agencies like WASA, DESA, Rajuk

would help the city dwellers to have

access to better water and power

over as Dhaka's new mayor on May

15 after performing Hajj for which he

would leave the capital on May 7.

Khoka also said he might take

He was hopeful unlike his prede-

A stronger co-ordination

including the opposition.

supply, he said.

Mayors take oath

FROM PAGE 1 boycotted the city polls claiming those would not be fair under the present Chief Election Commissioner MASved. An air of festivity was there at the

PMO and in areas close by with hundreds of party colleagues and well-wishers of the new mayors flocking to the venue and wishing them. The street in front of the PMO was decorated with colourful flags. Other streets leading to the venue witnessed a traffic tailback as scores of cars carrying the guests drove there.

Talking to journalists, Dhaka Mayor Khoka said after administer ing the oath prime minister asked him and the two other mayors to resolve the problems facing the city dwellers at the earliest. "We also assured her of working hard to resolve the long-standing crisis related to civic amenities," he said.

Khoka said he would strive to earn confidence of the citizens by resolving most visible problems like mosquito menace, run-down roads and footbridges. "We have also sought the prime minister's cooperation in this regard. Khoka alleged the DCC lost

people's confidence, as it had failed

to live up to their expectation and

was virtually run by armed thugs. He

promised to keep his office free from

cessors he would not find any problem with the local government ministry since he had good relations with all the ministers in the ministry. Asked to comment on yester-

day's hartal to protest 'rigging' in the mayoral polls in Raishahi, Raishahi Mayor Minu said those who have been isolated from the people for pursuing politics of arms and muscle are now trying to create a situa-

Salvaging sunken ships

country urgently needed a big rescue vessel with a capacity to rescue motor launches weighing above 100

The water transport authority has already sent a proposal in this regard, Hossain said adding such a rescue vessel would cost around one hundred crore taka.

Both MV Hamza and MV Rustam take a lot of time to reach the spot of an accident as these do not have engines to move and have to be pushed along by tug boats at an average speed of only four kilometres per hour.

MV Rustum remains anchored at Narayanganj and MV Hamza in Barisal. "We have urged successive

governments to procure more rescue vessels but they paid no heed to our plea." said Siddigur Rahman. According to the general secre-

tary of the Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers) Association, the number of launches weighing more than 100 tonnes would be around 250. Around 2,000 people have died in

launch accidents since independence he said While life is not secured on the

waterways, there is also no insurance coverage for the passengers. A draft proposal seeking insurance coverage for passengers still awaits final approval amidst strong opposition from the launch owners

Abdul Malek, the director general of

shipping. Rahman said the launch owners opposed insurance coverage for passengers, because of the Inland Shipping Order (ISO) provision for Tk one lakh in compensation for victims in a launch mishap.

If insurance coverage for passengers is introduced, the owners will have to pay a lot more in compensation, he explained. In case of a launch disaster, the

shipping directorate forms an inquiry committee and a case is filed with the marine court on the basis of the inquiry report. Malek said. The court may order a maximum of Tk one lakh in compensation for al

victims in an accident. A four-member inquiry committee has already been formed with Abdul

look into Friday night's mishap on the Meghna. The committee has been asked to submit its report within seven

The members of inquiry committee have been to the spot and started working, according to sources.

Meanwhile, Shipping Minister

Akbar Hossain left Dhaka yesterday

noon to visit the spot in Chandpur, according to a press release. He has also directed the BIWTA to carry the bodies recovered up to Patuakhali on government expendi-

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is also monitoring development after the accident, the press release said. A naval architect of the

Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) has been inducted in the government inquiry committee at the instruction of the prime minister, it

Earlier in the day, Samad Azad

Samad Azad said, "We came to

Bikkhu, a professor of Chittagong University, the rally was addressed by central AL leader Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, former minister and Chittagong north district AL president Mosharraf Hossain, former minister Dipanker Talukder, AL lawmaker from Raozan (Ctg-6) ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury, Buddhist guru Prof Bonashree Mohathero, Prof Bikiron Prasad Barua, former MP Abdul Latif Siddiquee and AL leader and former BCL president Shah Alam.