

Subha salvage

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There is no confirmed report on the number of passengers aboard the launch. Many survivors said the launch was carrying passengers more than its capacity. There were more than two hundred passengers aboard, they said.

Those who jumped into the water defying strong wind and furious crosscurrents of the Baleshwar survived the disaster, said the chairman of a Union Parishad (UP) in Mathbaria on condition of anonymity.

Another UP chairman concurred with him in allegation. Some ruling party leaders intimidated them into suppressing the fact that the MV Subha was overloaded, they alleged.

It is alleged that the high officials of Barisal, Barguna and Pirojpur administrations kept mum about the disaster even after recovery of 40 decomposed bodies.

Divers of Hamza, Rustam and BNS Shahjalal are also working under immense pressure of the ruling party leaders, said a highly placed source in the Barisal office of BIWTA.

It was nothing but eyewitness in the name of salvage operation, complained the relatives. "How can we believe that the launch cannot be salvaged even after its location underwater has been spotted." Oddly enough, the divers are destroying the dead bodies, apply-

ing different tactics on instruction of the authorities, they suspected.

Meanwhile, Our Staff Correspondent Aroop Talukdar writes from Barisal that work to salvage MV Subha remained suspended for the fifth day yesterday.

Salvage ship BNS Shahjalal sailed for the disaster spot early yesterday but could not reach there till filing of this report at 7:30 in the evening.

Weather was cloudy in Pirojpur yesterday with Baleswar more turbulent. Scores of people were still seen looking for their near and dear ones 'missing' in the river.

Launch service

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until and unless the decision of the government is not withdrawn, launch owners said.

There are nine motor launches in Khulna having capacity for carrying not more than 150 passengers. These launches ply on Khulna-Koyra route. But 33 motor launches ply on 17 routes of south-western zone are not legally authorised to carry more than 150 passengers, said an official of Khulna IWTA office.

The suspension of launch service on 17 routes from Khulna has adversely affected economic activities of business community who deal in rice, fishes and vegetables.

Donors' team

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collection, he added.

The development partners of Bangladesh decided to make an on-the-spot assessment of the situation following the deterioration of law and order in the CHT. All the foreign-aided projects halted following the abduction of three European engineers working at a Danish-aided road project at Rangamati on February 16 last year for ransom.

The road project is vital for the CHT since it would make communication easy, facilitating marketing of agricultural produce. The engineers were rescued a month later by the army, but the kidnappers are yet to be booked.

A case was filed in the Naniarchar Police Station but there has been no progress. A team of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) from Chittagong recently visited the area but they left without a proper investigation, sources from Rangamati told this paper yesterday.

However, the case has not yet been closed officially, they added.

The abduction and the reported payment of ransom of about Tk 1 crore had led to a series of kidnappings by a section of people patronised by the political groups. This caused the law and order to deteriorate in the three CHT districts, sources said.

The authorities are preparing for a crackdown on the miscreants to curb crimes, a highly placed official in Dhaka added.

Interest rate

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this country while it is very much there even in the West Bengal state of India," said the state minister.

He called for taping the benefit of WTO-induced free market accessibility after year 2004 and explore potential foreign markets for home-grown crops including vegetables. "We can grow exportable surplus and look for even Malaysian and Thai markets because these countries are moving towards hi-tech industries leaving behind the highly labour and cost-intensive agriculture sector."

The state minister noted that public investment in agriculture has to be augmented to ensuring technology adoption and application. He lauded the journalists for writing a book on contemporary agricultural issues and said, "this is a unique endeavour."

President of the FIDA and editor of the book Dr Golam Rahman chaired the book launching programme while FIDA General Secretary Reaz Ahmad delivered the welcome address. Managing Director of Syngenta Bangladesh Limited Sarwar Ahmed made concluding remarks.

Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council Dr Nurul Alam, Bangladesh Representative of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) Dr Hamid Miah, Member Director

(Seed) of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) Mokhlesur Rahman, Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Marketing (DAM) Shahna Begum and Prof Sheikh Abdus Salam of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department took part in the discussion.

Attack on journalist: 3 arrested at Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police yesterday arrested three youths from East Majampur area of the town in connection with the attack on Manavzami Correspondent Syed Nazmul Imam.

The arrested youths are Soheli, 18, Munna, 22 and Babu, 24.

Imam was stabbed by a gang of miscreants while returning home from his office on Monday night.

Local journalists held a rally in the town yesterday demanding immediate arrest of the culprits responsible for the attack.

Death chill

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Quiyum told The daily Star that there were serious threats, as records show, on the lives of some ward commissioners.

Meanwhile, the pace of investigation into Newton and Bina murder cases has slowed down, as police could not arrest the main accused.

Sharika Sarkar, widow of Bina, filed a murder case with the Kotwali Police Station on Saturday accusing 26 people, including local BNP leader Mosharrar Hossain Ripon and his supporter Ranjeet Chandra Nandi.

Police arrested 17 persons -- 15 on May 22 and two last Friday -- in connection with the killing under the Section 54 of the CrPC, but failed to arrest the prime accused Ripon.

Of them, eight people were shown arrested in the Bina murder case. They are Ranjeet Chandra Nandi, Mohammad Liton, Ahmed Parvej Kabir, Shahjahan, Moshir Rahman, Rahim Uddin Ahmed alias Felu, Selim and Mohammad Al-Amin.

In the Newton murder case were arrested eight persons; and Rubel Hossain Hawladar alias Rubel, one of the arrested, gave confessional statements before the court. On Saturday night, police also attached the properties of BNP leader Moshir Rahman Masu, an accused in the Newton murder case. But police are yet to arrest him.

Kazi Ismail, the injured bodyguard of Newton, was also arrested on Saturday. He was placed on a three-day remand for interrogation. Police believe Ismail informed the killers about the whereabouts of Newton in exchange for a huge amount of money.

The sources said that as many as 13 people, including Kala Jahangir, 'Killer' Abbas and Piyal were hired for killing. Five of them shot and killed Newton.

Hepatitis-B

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showed that about five per cent of the population is chronically infected with the deadly virus -- Hepatitis-B -- and the WHO estimates that about 10 lakh people would die from liver cirrhosis and cancer because of the virus infection.

Chances of getting liver cancer are up to 300 times higher for hepatitis B carriers.

"The vaccination programme is to reduce mortality and morbidity associated with chronic hepatitis-B infection, including cirrhosis and cancer," said an official of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) recently.

Hepatitis B vaccine has now been used extensively throughout the world and is currently being incorporated into the EPI of the WHO.

Hepatitis B vaccines have been available globally since 1982 and currently, 90 countries are using the vaccines as part of their national immunisation programmes.

Hepatitis - B virus is transmitted through body fluids, most commonly by sexual acts, unsafe blood transfusion and sharing of needles for injections.

Viva Vieri

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because they are two valid and important players that know what I want from them on the pitch in that particular role."

Cuper also spoke on the year spent in Italy, pointing out the most positive and negative aspects: "Overall, I am satisfied. I like the good relationship with the Italian press, the warmth of the people and the professionalism of those working with me - all the positive aspects I knew I would find in Italy. The only negative experience was losing in Rome on the last day.

"I think we are capable of playing well both in the Champions League and domestic competition. We are putting together a team in order to try to win both. We have also thought about a particular training scheme for the same reason. This will be a hard year where everyone will have to give their maximum effort. The only thing I am thinking of is to win a cup with Inter.

"We still have to work on the team philosophy. This is something you never stop working on. My players will have to demonstrate even more team spirit and the ability to suffer."

UZ polls

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authorities are thinking of scheduling the elections in January next year, said election officials.

The EC also incorporated the issues like 'the most complicated' elections to upazila parishads, remaining pourashavas and newly commissioned Barisal and Sylhet city corporations in the agenda.

The four-member electoral body has failed to hold elections to 463 upazilas despite the EC's legal authority since reintroduction of the upazila system in 1997.

The last Awami League government revoked the EC's authority of holding elections to upazila parishads and vested it in the local government ministry. Now, a legal move is on to return the authority to the EC.

The election officials said that today's meeting would only look into the possibilities of the upazila election, and the election would take place once the law is changed.

The commission has conducted elections to 207 out of 251 pourashavas in a staggered manner. It would also look for the way to make an end to complexities facing the elections to the remaining pourashavas.

Fitness test

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fishing nets in which the propellers get entangled.

He demanded that a 100-yard wide channel must be declared open for navigation in all major rivers. He alleged that the quality of services in the river routes has not improved due to lack of efficient 'masters' and technical staff.

Kalimullah said that the waterways were being 'squeezed' due to lack of regular dredging.

Placing various demands for improving the situation in water transport sector, he said his organisation is ready to accept any rules and regulations for this.

Although the government had decided to form a committee to identify problems and prospects of the sector four months ago, it was yet to be formed, he said.

Kalimullah criticised the government for 'not arranging adequate training facilities' for masters, drivers and other technicians. "The sector is badly affected due to lack of efficient manpower."

He also urged the government to increase the capacity of the BIWTA salvage vessels.

Naval architects pointed out that massive flaws in design and structure of the passenger launches plying on various river routes were the main causes of accidents.

They also blamed mushroom growth of dockyards without any expertise on shipbuilding for many accidents. These are building vessels in the most rudimentary way without considering any risk factors during natural disasters, they noted.

Referring to two recent launch accidents, the naval architects observed that besides overloading and inefficiency of the masters of those vessels, deviation from the original design was one of the causes of the accidents.

"I strongly believe that most of the passenger vessels in operation have massive defects in design and structure," said Dr Abdullah Bari, President of the Association of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, Bangladesh.

He observed that 'inadequate stability was the most pertinent cause' of capsizing of launches. Most of the launches have 'high superstructure of steel, making them top heavy.'

"To have proper design of vessels, meeting the stability criteria and to ensure building strictly as per design and thorough supervision by regulatory bodies are the remedies," he said.

Bari stressed that if there was no flaw in the design of the vessels, they would not capsize within a few seconds.

He demanded formation of a single regulatory body to ensure passenger safety. The proposed body should also check deviation from the original design of the vessels.

Salahuddin Ahmed, another marine engineer, said passengers are not safe in most of the launches because 'additional weight has been added to their top,' which increase the risk.

Captain Mohiuddin Abdul Kadir, General Secretary of Nautical Institute (Bangladesh) Branch, said that following the launch disaster in the Meghna, he conducted an investigation and found basic design faults in most of the passenger vessels.

He said the engine room in most of the vessels is not watertight. During a storm, water rushes into the ground floor of a vessel, quickly inundates the engine room and makes the vessel instantly unstable. The engine room must be made watertight. In that case, even if a vessel sinks, it will take enough time, making it possible to save many lives. BUET must be given the responsibility of doing the inclination test," he suggested.

The launch owners said although river vessels are the cheapest mode of transportation of both passengers and goods, the sector hardly gets government attention. Allocation for the sector in the annual development programme (ADP) is negligible, they said.

They demanded proper maintenance of river routes through regular dredging.

Most of the participants emphasised the need for ban on use of fishing nets in navigational channels. They said that despite realising huge taxes, the BIWTA has done little to keep the navigation channels safe for vessels.

Due to lack of dredging, most of the rivers have lost navigability during dry season, they said.

Mohammad Badiuzzaman Badal, vice president of launch owners association, resented that launch owners are not included in probe bodies for accidents. He said that they would not accept any probe report without the involvement of owners in the probe bodies.

He said the launch owners were getting the blame for the accidents but they were not getting any incentive for their contribution to the sector.

Abdullah Omar Siddique, Vice Chairman of the Institute of Marine Engineering Science and Technology, said awareness must be created among the people who use the water transport sector. He demanded 'on-the-spot arrangements' for punishing a lawbreaker in the sector.

Captain Mohammad Enayetus Sobhan demanded that the navigation channels must be 'marked properly'. He said an institution must be set up to produce technical staff such as masters, seacanny and drivers.

The shipping minister said his ministry would soon have about 20 standard prototype ship designs made by experts. The private investors could follow the designs and have their fitness certificates issued automatically, he added.

If a owner does not want to follow these designs and goes for his own design, experts would conduct a fitness test, Akbar Hossain Hossain said. He would try for amendment to the registration laws for vessels in the next session of parliament, he assured.

Now all vessels under 16 Horse-Power are exempted from registration, but the new law would make it mandatory to get every vessel registered, even country boats, with the local authorities, he said.

Khabirul Haque Chowdhury, associate professor at the BUET, said if every vessel is insured, the insurance companies would ensure that safety procedures on the vessels are properly maintained. He said there is no need to create a separate office for the sector. The BIWTA with all its network must be strengthened and all shipyards must be enlisted and regulated, he stressed.

Habibul Alam, owner of two vessels, called for dredging of the channels to make them navigational. He appealed to the government not to 'burden the owners with lots of rules and regulations'.

Dr Reaz Hasan Khandakar, Head of BUET's department of NAME, demanded a separate regulatory body to discipline the sector. He said the Department of Shipping (DoS) is already burdened with many other responsibilities and therefore fails to do its jobs properly.

He said there is only one DoS surveyor in Narayanganj and Dhaka, where about 1,500 vessels are built a year. But there are two surveyors in Khulna and Barisal where less than 250 vessels are built a year.

Prof Abdur Rahim the department of NAME demanded updating the method of evaluation and analysis of the vessels. He said four factors--- liability, accountability, responsibility and a clear cut authority--- must be ensured for a healthy growth of the sector.

Commander (ret'd) Faizur Rahman said DoS is mostly responsible for sea-going ships. It does not have any naval architect to supervise the growth of the sector.

Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam moderated the discussion.

Appointment of judges

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people would be appointed a judge, then people would raise questions even if competent persons were made judges. This would ultimately threaten the image of the judiciary, they felt.

The lawyers told the president that only the chief justice could evaluate the performance of an additional judge. Therefore, when his recommendation is ignored, it is bound to affect independence of the judiciary.

They referred to a similar incident in 1994 when lawyers had sought the then president's intervention. The then president had also stated that he was constitutionally bound to act as per the prime minister's advice.

However, the delegation argued that there were scopes for the president to discuss and to take and give advice on different issues beyond the Constitution.

The then president had finally met the then prime minister and helped resolve the issue, they pointed out.

The committee hoped that the incumbent president would similarly

3 more ships fined for polluting air, sea water

UNB, Ctg

Three more ships, including a ship of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC), have been fined for polluting air and water in the country's largest seaport area.

The port magistrate court yesterday fined three ships -- Indonesian flag-carrier oil tanker MV Tirola Nayaga, Panamanian flag-carrier MV Amarta Jaya-1, and oil tanker of BSC Banglar Sourav -- Tk 80,000.

Banglar Sourav was fined twice within last one week for polluting water and air.

In addition, the port magistrate also served show cause notices on three other foreign ships anchored at the port jetty for polluting air and water.

Recently, 10 sea-bound foreign ships were punished under port environment law, and 28 domestic and foreign ships were fined Tk 3.5 lakh in last three days on various charges.

Resist crime

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to end the misrule of the present government and unite to fulfill the demand of social security by the people.

It also urged the political parties to avoid the current violent and confrontational politics to make the parliament effective for the betterment of the people.

Demanding the separation of the judiciary from the executive wing, the Gano Forum said the judiciary should be separated without any further delay to arrest increasing violation of human rights across the country and to establish justice in the society.

Party presidium members Pankaj Bhattacharya and Saifuddin Ahmed Manik also spoke on the occasion.

Different socio-cultural organisations expressed their solidarity with the meeting and urged the people to create a national consensus against the social and political perpetrators.

Journalist Foyez ahmed, Advocate Sultana Kamal of Ain-o-Salish Kendra, Palash Jhisa and Jiten Chakma of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity, Vice-president of the Supreme Court Bar Association Advocate Parimal Chandra Guha, Pir Habibur Rahman, President of Dhaka Lawyers Association SM Altaf Hossain, General Secretary of Bangladesh Teacher's Association Chowdhury Khorshed Alam, among others, expressed their solidarity with the meeting.

'go beyond' political considerations' for the sake of 'protecting' the Constitution and would share his wisdom and experience with the prime minister in this regard.

The members of the committee include Parimal Chandra Guha, M Amin-ul-Islam, SS Halder, Shafique Ahmed, KS Nabi, ANM Gazilul Haq and Abul Basat Majumder.

The senior lawyers will meet Law Minister Moudud Ahmed today.

A member of the team told The Daily Star, if necessary, they would meet the prime minister. "Because we feel that it is necessary to confirm the appointments of these judges in the interest of the nation," he said.

"In order to uphold the dignity of the judiciary, it is absolutely necessary to stop politicising the appointments of judges," he went on.

Biman plight

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The Saudia Airlines might carry an additional 25,000 pilgrims from Bangladesh; Mir Nasiruddin said adding that they also agreed to waive US\$ 73 royalty Bangladeshi pilgrims were to pay for the year.

Replying to a CCCI demand, the minister assured the business community that a fully-fledged customs booth would be established at the Chittagong airport within next 10 days to reduce harassment on the passengers. Another proposal of CCCI for setting up a 'bunker fuelling station' is now under consideration of the government, he said.

Earlier, CCCI President Farid Ahmad Chowdhury put accent on decentralisation of power and some offices from capital Dhaka to Chittagong to make it the commercial capital in true sense.

The CCCI chief also urged the government for establishing 'provincial system of government' and 'second capital' in Chittagong.

Chowdhury alleged that despite a written instruction from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) recently, red-tapism is delaying the allotment of .03 bigha land required for setting up the World Trade Centre (WTC) in Chittagong.

Later, an open discussion on different aspects and problems in Chittagong and of businesses was held. CCCI Senior Vice-President SM Nurul Haq and Vice-President MA Latif, among others, attended the discussion.

Indo-Pak

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but have not agreed to talks with each other.

Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov told Interfax news agency Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf had agreed only to bilateral talks with Putin at a regional security summit.

"Not all participants at the forthcoming talks have agreed to the staging of a trilateral meeting," Interfax quoted Losyukov, the ministry's top Asian expert, as saying.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's army said yesterday that fierce artillery and mortar duels along the Frontier near Sialkot, along the disputed border, killed five Pakistani civilians, injured seven and caused hundreds to flee.

The Indian army said cross-border firing killed six Indian civilians in Dras, 150 kilometers north of Srinagar, the summer capital of India's Jammu-Kashmir state.

India has moved ships into the Arabian Sea, closer to Pakistan, both armies have deployed missiles, and Pakistan completed three days of tests on Tuesday of nuclear-capable missiles that can reach inside India.

The United States and other governments have said they are worried about the possibility of nuclear war.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan phoned Musharraf on Tuesday and called Indian Prime Minister yesterday urging "the utmost diplomatic efforts" to defuse tension.

Vajpayee said positive action must be taken first by Pakistan, said Koizumi's spokeswoman.

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agitating workers and employees to withdraw the abstention by last night and sit for talks with the chamber in a bid to resolve the impasse. Cargo handling of as many as twenty-five vessels now staying at the port could not be held yesterday due to the strike. The strike also severely hampered official and administrative works of the port as some 5,000 workers and employees of the port as well for the first time joined the work abstention, sources said.

The CPA in the circular on Monday revised section 22 (B) of Shore-handling Agreement allowing the stevedores belonging to the BMSA to employ stevedoring workers from anywhere they like.

Before the revision, the stevedores were bound to engage stevedoring workers only from the Stevedoring Staff Union, a member of the Parishad.

Meanwhile, the Port Users Forum at a press conference at a city hotel in the afternoon termed the

work abstention by the workers and employees 'illogical' and 'illegal'.

The Forum leaders held that the revision of the section in the new circular would not harm the interests of the stevedoring workers or employees or anyone in any way.

In a written statement, they said the BMSA had already formed a committee to hold talks with the Stevedoring Staff Union to identify and resolve the contentious issues.

The forum leaders further said that the revised circular would rather ensure some loyalty, accountability and transparency, and infuse dynamism into the port operation. It would also save time and reduce wastage of money.

They Forum leaders also suggested that a retired judge of High Court division examine the legality of the revision preferably in one month's time and expressed their readiness to bear the necessary expenses.

They called upon the government for cancellation of the registra-

tion of the dock workers' organisation if found involved in anti-labour law activities and working against the law of land.

They also called for declaring the port area as 'special zone', all works inside the port as 'essential service' and clamping a ban on illegal and anti-labour law activities inside the port.

At the conference acting Chairman of the Port Users Forum M Sallimullah read out the written statement. CCCI President Farid Ahmed Chowdhury, BMSA Chairman AHM Monjor Alam, President of C&F Association Akter Hossain Chowdhury, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association leader Ershad Ullah, Mahub Ali

of Shippers Council of Bangladesh and Moazzem Hossain of Steamers Agents

Association also replied to newsmen.

Anniversary of Zia's death

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position of the late leader in history," he said.

The President said proper and right honour to the memory of Shaheed Zia would be given only when independence and sovereignty are preserved and multiparty democracy is successfully reflected in national life.

He prayed for peace of the departed soul.

BNP and its front organisations have chalked out a 10-day programme in observance of the death anniversary.

The programme includes laying of wreaths at the mazar of Ziaur Rahman, Qurankhwani, milad mahfil, feeding the destitute, discussions, photo exhibitions, blood donation and cultural programmes.

BNP will hoist party flag at half mast and black flag atop its central office and party offices all over the country in the morning. Leaders and workers of BNP and its front organisations will visit the mazar of Ziaur Rahman, place wreaths, offer fатеha and participate in a milad mahfil there.

National dailies will bring out special supplements on the occasion while Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television will air

special programme.

BNP and its front organisations will also arrange milad mahfil, special prayers and feeding the destitute at some 400 places in the city from May 30 to June 2. Various units of BNP and its front organisations have chalked out similar programmes at ward, union, thana and district levels.

Special prayers will be held in the mosques across the country seeking eternal peace of the departed soul of President Zia.

As part of the programme, Doctors Association of Bangladesh held a discussion on Tuesday entitled 'Janat Zia' at the National Press Club. Zia Sangskritik Sangathan also held another discussion at the National Sports Council the same day.

BNP held a discussion at the Engineers Institution yesterday afternoon, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister and party secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan attended the function as chief guest.

The Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh yesterday held a discussion on the life and works of Shaheed Zia. Religious affairs minister Mosharrar Hossain Shahjahan attended the function as chief guest.

Huge sea of ice in Mars

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been looking for water for a number of reasons. For one, life as we know it requires water, and anyone who wants to spend any time on the planet would need water to drink and to use as a source of hydrogen for fuel.

"The amount of water present on Mars is sufficiently large that it can support future human exploration activities," said Bill Feldman of the Department of Energy's Los Alamos National Laboratory, who helped direct the research.

"We see it is and it is a big, huge whopping jumble of soil and ice," NASA's Jim Garvin said. "It's a lot of stuff and it was found in a way that not totally expected and it bodes well for Mars offering us more goodies as we go into the ground."

Scientists are also fascinated by what the finding means for understanding the weather and geology of Mars.