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BURIGANGA LAUNCH CAPSIZE

Death toll reaches 120

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 120 people drowned and several others were missing as a passenger launch caught in a sudden storm capsized in the Buriganga river at Munshikhola in Pagla of Narayanganj on Saturday night. One hundred-eighteen bodies were recovered from the launch -- MV Maharaj -- which sank with more than 200 passengers and was salvaged yesterday. Around 60 passengers swam ashore or were rescued and others were still to be traced. Those killed in the worst launch disaster this year included 84 men, 25 women and nine children. Sixteen of them could not be identified.



The crew of rescue vessel MV Rustam Sunday seen salvaging launch MV Maharaj, which sank with more than 200 passengers in the river Buriganga on Saturday night.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Bodies of three Ansar members
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Govt sleeps as over 4,000 die in decade

Not a single probe report published yet

RAFIQ HASAN

Over 4,000 people have died in water vessel disasters in the last decade alone, largely because the government, even after tall talks and strong commitments on several occasions, has utterly failed to develop any mechanism to protect the lives of launch passengers.

The latest launch accident on Saturday night, in which 120 passengers died while plying the river Buriganga, highlights the long and poor track record of river vessel safety.

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Saifur unhappy over Washington meet

Tells EC a group 'patronised by opposition' feeding wrong information about Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has expressed his grievances to the European Union (EU) for organising a meeting in Washington on governance on February 23 and 24 without any representative from Bangladesh.

"If there is a meeting on Bangladesh's development process,

this should take place in Bangladesh," Saifur told newsmen at Zia International Airport yesterday morning on his return from a 11-day trip to Jeddah, London, Brussels and Rome.

"We are a sovereign country and a large country," he added.

Saifur met 13 European Commission (EC) commissioners

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Nation pays homage to language martyrs

DU CORRESPONDENT

The nation yesterday observed the Shaheed Day and International Mother Language Day commemorating the supreme sacrifices of the martyrs of February 21 in 1952 to uphold the dignity of the mother language, Bangla.

Following UNESCO's declaration of February 21 as the International Mother Language Day in 1999, 188 countries of the world now observe the day.

Thousands of barefoot people wearing black badges and singing the melancholic chorus "Amar bhaiyer rakte rangano Ekushey

February, ami ki bhullite pari," walked to the Central Shaheed Minar and placed wreaths there in the early hours.

President Iajuddin Ahmed led the nation in paying tributes to the martyrs and placed wreaths after the clock struck one minute past twelve. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia followed and both the president and the prime minister stood for sometime in solemn silence.

Then Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar and Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps Shahta Zarab,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Grenade blast at Moulvibazar shrine

Imam, madrasa teacher held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A grenade exploded at Shaiding shrine in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar on Sunday night badly damaging the structure of the shrine.

No casualty, however, was reported while the roof of the shrine was blown up.

Immediately after the explosion, locals captured a local Imam and a madrasa teacher on suspicion, and handed them over to police.

Police said the detainees -- Maruf Mohammed Ishaque, 22, and Quamrul -- had confessed their involvement in the explosion. Police declined to elaborate on the leads obtained from the two.

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12 militants held with important materials

3 arrested at JU Ekushey programme with timer, jihad tape; Dhamrai militants carry bomb-making formula

STAR REPORT

Twelve suspected extremists were arrested from Dhamrai, Jahangirnagar University (JU) and Joypurhat Sunday night.

The six arrested from Dhamrai were found with bomb-making formulas, masks, wigs and important documents belonging to an extremist organisation, while JU authorities also found a timer and an audio tape containing a speech

protesting attempts to arrest Osama bin Laden, Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini and Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Haque.

Intelligence agencies, meantime, have mounted surveillance on a number of mosques in the north-western regions of the country in the wake of a recent wave of bomb attacks on various NGOs, including Brac and Grameen Bank.

DHAMRAI ARREST

A patrol team of Dhamrai police challenged eight youths as they were

walking by Joypura Jora bridge on the Dhaka-Aricha highway at 1:00am yesterday.

Two of them managed to flee while six others were arrested.

It has been learnt that four of the six -- Abdul Wahab, 26, Yakub Ali, 21, Faruq Hossain, 34, Rafiqul Islam, 18, Nurul Islam, 20, and Anwar Hossain, 23, -- are students of the area's Sharifabad Madrasa.

"Each of them was carrying a

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PHOTO: STAR

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia observe one minute of silence after placing wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar on the stroke of midnight Monday.

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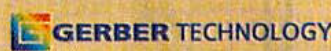
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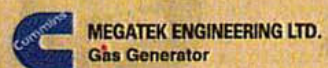
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