

# Ban on new launches with more than 2 decks under consideration

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan tells *The Daily Star*

KAILASH SARKAR

The government is considering imposing a ban on construction of launches with more than two decks with a view to preventing launch disasters, which cause huge loss of lives every year.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan said this in an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star* at his office in the city yesterday.

"In the future, none would be allowed to build launches with more than two decks," he said, adding that steps would also be taken to phase out such launches operating on the river routes.

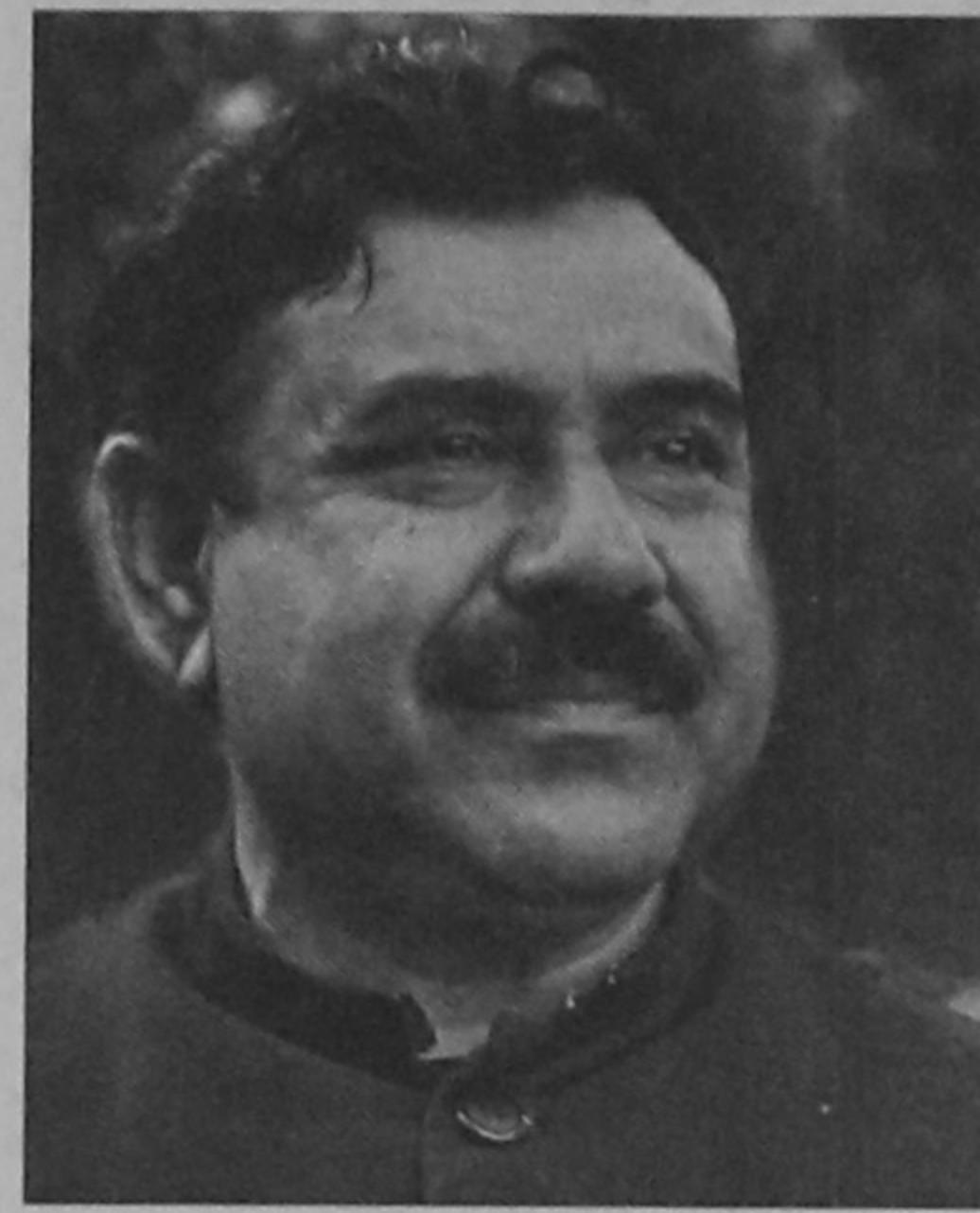
"The owners of launches with more than two decks would be requested to convert their vessels into double-decker ones," the minister said.

According to sources, about 5,000 people have been killed in launch disasters since 1991. But the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport (Passenger Carriers) Agency (BIWTPCA) puts the figure at 2,300.

Explaining the reasons behind the government move, Shahjahan Khan said the launches with more than two decks are more vulnerable to accidents, as they can easily lose their balance due to various factors, including overloading of passengers.

"We have discussed the issue at inter-ministerial meetings and experts also expressed the same views in this regard. However, no decision has yet been taken in this regard."

Replying to a query, the minister said, "It is true that just after any launch disasters in the past, the



Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan

authorities concerned have always vowed to take stern action against the persons responsible and also to take preventive measures. But after some days, they forgot their commitments."

"I can assure you that this government will not do the same. Rather, it will work towards fulfilling its commitments," he said.

"We have plans to evict encroachers from the rivers and restore navigability of the rivers to enable water vessels to operate smoothly," he added.

The government will also take some other decisions to protect river water from pollution through raising mass awareness, said the minister.

"Each launch must have waste bins and garbage bags so that the passengers can put waste into them instead of dumping them into the river," he said.

"We are also trying to introduce some measures so that the launches do not carry more passengers than their capacity and the people also do not board any launches full of passengers."

According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority and BIWTPCA, around 600 launches are operating on different routes from Sadarghat Launch Terminal in the city.

The number of launch routes has declined from 51 to 36 in the last 10 years due to lack of navigability and various anti-river activities.

The number of launch passengers has also declined significantly. Earlier, 20,000 people, on an average, used to travel by launches from Sadarghat. But now the number has gone down to 10,000 to 12,000.

According to BIWTPCA Senior Vice-President Badiuzzaman Badal, water vessels carry about five lakh passengers during Eid holidays.



Deputy Leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Finance Minister AMA Muhith and LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam receive Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Zia International Airport in the city yesterday on her return from Copenhagen climate change conference. (Story on page 16)

## DCC draft voter list Jan 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Draft voter list for Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) area will be published on January 3, allowing voters to file complaints against errors if any, the Election Commission (EC) announced yesterday.

With the draft voter list publication for DCC, the EC started the process across the country to prepare the final electoral roll with photo-graphs.

"Directives regarding

publication of district level draft voter list will be issued later," said the EC Secretariat in a press release.

The schedule would allow people to verify the draft voter list for DCC at the district and Thana election offices, ward commissioners' offices and voter registration centres till January 18.

People will have to file application on or before the date for correction or amendment in the list. The revision authorities will decide on the

applications by January 26 while decision on them will be incorporated in the list by January 31.

After the process, the final voter list for DCC will be published on February 3. And then the EC will announce schedule for the DCC polls, which will be held at the end of March or early April.

The EC prepared draft voter list countrywide through updating the electoral roll prepared for the ninth parliamentary election.

## Obituary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kamal Uddin Ahmed, the first deputy commissioner of Dhaka after independence, passed away due to a cardiac arrest at his residence at Uttara in the city yesterday at the age of 83, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, two sons and two daughters to mourn his death.

He was buried at Sector-6 graveyard in Uttara.

His Quirkhwan will be held at his Uttara residence after Asr prayers on Thursday.

**Md Jinnatul Islam**

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Advocate Md Jinnatul Islam, organising secretary of Kishoreganj district

Awami League and former president of Kishoreganj Bar Association, passed away at his residence in Kishoreganj yesterday at the age of 62.

He left behind wife, three sons and three daughters and a host of admirers to mourn him.

He was buried at Shokalia Bage Zannat graveyard yesterday.

Speaker Advocate Abdul Hamid and LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam expressed shock at his death and paid for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members.

**Death anniversary**

BSS, Dhaka

Today is the second death anniversary of Fazlul Karim, Language Movement veteran, journalist and sports organizer.

On the occasion, a memorial meeting will be held at the conference lounge of Jatiya Press Club at 4:00pm today, family sources said.

**Abdul Haque**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 14th death anniversary of comrade Abdul Haque, says a press release.

On the occasion, wreaths will be placed at his grave at martyred intellectual graveyard in Mirpur in the morning and a discussion will be held at Moni Singh-Farhad Memorial Trust building auditorium at 4:00pm.

**Kohinoor Banu**

METRO DESK

Today is the 16th death anniversary of Kohinoor Banu, mother of martyred intellectual Prof Abdul Kalam Azad, says a press release.

On the occasion, a mild mafil and Qurankhwan will be held at House-35/B, Road-07, Block-G, Banani at 11:00am.

Ameerah takes over as UN Under Secy Gen Jan 5

UNB, Dhaka

Ameerah Haq has been appointed Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative for Timor-Leste and Head of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT).

She will take office in Dili, Timor-Leste on January 5, says a press release.

Ameerah Haq is the highest-ranking UN staff from Bangladesh and the first woman from Bangladesh to reach this level.

She served as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan, and prior to that, as Deputy Representative for Afghanistan. In both cases she also held the position of UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Representative of UNDP.

**Extend Ekushey Book Fair to Suhrawardy Udyog**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eleven Asian labour sending countries will frame a common policy to address problems in the overseas employment process, said Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain yesterday.

The initiative has been taken in the wake of labour problems caused following the global economic meltdown, he said in an interview with BBC radio broadcast.

Mosharraf Hossain is the

chair of the Colombo Process, a regional grouping of 11 countries that started in 2003.

The countries include Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

The process aims to continue to provide a forum for dialogue among the member states. With the continued participation of the destination countries, this dialogue is set to evolve and contribute to strengthening migration management both in the Asian region and in countries of destination.

In the wake of global meltdown, thousands of Asian workers, including Bangladeshi, returned home on long vacation or lost jobs.

Bangladesh's labour market also shrunk almost by half compared to last year's figure of 8.75 lakh.

**Man held for demanding Tk 1 crore from lawmaker**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) last night arrested a man at Sarail in Brahmanbaria on charges of demanding Tk one crore from Zia Haque Mridha, a Jatiya Party lawmaker in the district.

The arrestee, Mostafa Haider, 28, over cellphone yesterday morning threatened to kill the son of Mridha if the lawmaker does not give the amount Haider was demanding. Commander Mohammad Sohail, director, Legal and Media Wing of Rab, told The Daily Star.

A Rab team from Bhairab camp started tracking the criminal soon after they received the information and finally arrested him in less than 12 hours from Sarail and the Law Commission's office at Bhairab.

The senior lawmaker said this while talking to this correspondent at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

He said the ongoing debate over the remark of a judge would cause harm to the people, the political parties, the government and the judiciary as well. So, the government should handle the issue carefully.

The senior lawmaker said this while talking to this correspondent at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

"I hope the issue will be resolved amicably before the upcoming session of parliament," said Suranjit, also the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry.

"The people hope that a judge and a lawmaker will show respect to each other and any deviation from this will cause harm to the people as well as the government," he added.

**Exhibition of photographs on liberation war begins**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-day exhibition of rare photographs taken during the liberation war by freedom fighter and journalist Haroon Habib began at the National Museum in the city yesterday.

Around 100 photographs are put on display at the photography exhibition titled 'Ekature Jatri'.

Alongside the exhibition, two seminars will also be held at the National Museum today and tomorrow.

An album of a total of 88 photographs taken by Haroon Habib and an autobiographical novel by Haroon was also launched yesterday.

Joya Taher, daughter of Col (retd) Taher, and Nadeem Qadir, son of Col Muhammad Abdul Qadir, a martyr of the liberation war, inaugurated the exhibition.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Haroon Habib said the new generation should know more about the liberation war and the exhibition is an effort to this end.

"I could take those photographs, because alongside being a freedom fighter, I was also the war correspondent of Mujibnagar expatriate government," he added.

A case will be filed against him in this connection, police said.

Justice Nozrul might have made comment due to ignorance Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said Justice Nozrul Islam Chowdhury might have made a comment on lawmakers due to his ignorance of the process of making laws.

However, it is not appropriate for a judge of the High Court to make such a comment on the members of parliament, he said while replying to queries from reporters.

At a meeting on Saturday, Justice Nozrul Islam said, "It is not much difficult to make laws in parliament. Clerks draft the laws and the parliament members pass them with applause without knowing anything about them. Most of them even do not read the drafts."

On Sunday, State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam protested the remark of Justice Nozrul and said he would lodge complaints to the Supreme Judicial Council against the justice.

Meanwhile, Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta yesterday said the government should handle this 'sensitive issue' intelligently and sensibly.

He said the ongoing debate over the remark of a judge would cause harm to the people, the political parties, the government and the judiciary as well. So, the government should handle the issue carefully.

The senior lawmaker said this while talking to this correspondent at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

"I hope the issue will be resolved amicably before the upcoming session of parliament," said Suranjit, also the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry.

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**BCL activist caught while snatching**

DU CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activist was caught red-handed while snatching a mobile phone from a pedestrian on the Dhaka University (DU) campus yesterday.

Police said their patrol team and pedestrians caught

Pervez, a student of philosophy department and resident of Surjo Sen Hall, while snatching a phone near Doel Chottor at around 3:00pm.

Sources in Surjo Sen Hall confirmed that Pervez is an active activist of the hall unit BCL.

DU Proctor Dr KM Saiful Islam Khan confirmed the incident and said three more people were involved in the process managed to flee the scene immediately.

A case will be filed against him in this connection, police said.

**War crimes trial venue may be shifted: Shafique**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government may shift the war crimes trial venue from 14 Abdul Gani Road as the space for setting up tribunal and other offices is not sufficient, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said yesterday.

Earlier, the government started the process of setting up tribunal and other offices at 14 Abdul Gani Road near the secretariat but recently halted the process.

Shafique said the space at Abdul Gani Road is not sufficient for setting up tribunal and other relevant offices. He was talking to reporters after visiting offices at Abdul Gani Road and the Law Commission's office at 14 Abdul Gani Road.

State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam was present on the occasion.

**Primary Terminal Exam results today**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The result of the Primary Education Terminal Examination will be published simultaneously at 3:00pm today.

Primary and Mass Education Minister Afzal Amin will brief the newsmen at 3:00pm about the results at his secretariat office, says an official release.

The examination began on November 21 with the participation of over 18 lakh stu-

dents of class V.

The government introduced the new public exam in place of primary scholarship examination with a view to imparting equal education to all students.

The students must pass the terminal exam to get enrolled in class VI. Scholarships will be awarded on the basis of their results in two categories -- talent