

250 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CURB INLAND VESSEL ACCIDENTS

Not a single suggestion implemented in 25yrs

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Although different probe committees on riverine accidents submitted hundreds of recommendations during the last 25 years, the government is yet to take effective measures to implement a single one.

Since 1985, a total of 863 probe committees on 535 major inland vessel accidents have been formed and they submitted reports with more than 250 major recommendations to the government, said a study of Safe Water Way Implementation Movement, an NGO.

This situation is a "gross negligence" to public safety by the government's regulatory bodies and profit-monger vessel owners, it says.

Some major recommendations include increasing of ship surveyors and inspectors in the Department of Shipping (DOS), checking faulty designs and structural weakness of inland vessels, formation of river police, increasing of salvage points, modernisation of Inland Shipping

Ordinance (ISO), 1976, increasing of marine counts, bringing all the inland vessels under marine insurance and arrangement of formal training for the drivers.

Now only two surveyors are working to verify fitness of 11,308 registered and over 23,000 unregistered vessels plying the country's different inland water routes, said Bazlur Rahman, director general of DOS, in a statement.

But the government did not pay heed to the problem that has been continuing for years.

Recently Bazlur Rahman in an official letter to the shipping ministry recommended hand over the responsibilities of inland ship surveying and design approval to the private sector (classification society) to bring dynamism in those activities.

Most of the investigation reports found faulty design and structural weaknesses in water vessels to be the major causes of riverine accidents. But the

10 major recommendations

- Increase of ship surveyors and inspectors
- Regular checking of fitness and structural design of inland vessels
- Formation of river police and marine safety committee
- Setting up salvage points and increase of salvage vessels
- Modernisation of Inland Shipping Ordinance, 1976
- Increase of marine courts
- Bringing all inland vessels under marine insurance
- Proper training for drivers
- Regular drives of mobile courts to stop carrying of excess passengers
- Setting up radars in every vessel

sloppiness of the concerned authorities has significantly contributed to the plying of unfit and faulty designed vessels, which regularly pose a risk to lives.

Only two surveyors under DOS

responsible for checking designs and structural fitness of vessels and four inspectors of Inspectorate of Inland Shipping responsible for carrying out inspection in the vessels are working in

the country's waterways.

Despite several recommendations for arrangement of training to develop skills and quality of vessel crews, neither the government nor the vessel owners had taken any initiative in this regard.

A number of probe committees recommended for strengthening and conducting mobile courts in waterways in coordination with the central administration, district administrations and local police. But the DOS officials did not conduct mobile courts regularly.

A high official of the DOS told The Daily Star that political pressures, unfavourable circumstances and shortage of manpower are the reasons for not being able to conduct mobile courts regularly. These are creating opportunities for unfit, unregistered and overloaded vessels to ply the waterways.

Some probe reports also said sluggish rescue operations caused the death toll to rise after accidents and suggested increase the number of 'Salvage Stations' to accelerate such rescue operations. There are

two salvage vessels but no salvage point in the country.

The government neither took any initiative to form river police nor modernise the Inland Shipping Ordinance to prevent accidents in waterways.

The government is yet to enact any laws making marine insurance mandatory for inland vessels.

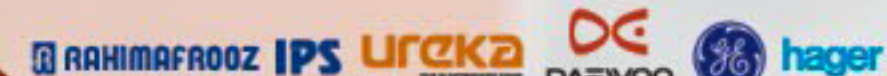
Talking to the Daily Star Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan said, "I know that most of the recommendations do not see the light of day. But I have asked the director general of shipping to compile all the recommendations. Then I will scrutinise them and take measures to implement them."

Chief Inspector of the Inspectorate of Inland Shipping told The Daily Star that "We have received a lot of recommendations but this inspectorate is yet to get the required inspectors rather running with only four inspectors though eight posts were sanctioned in 1983 and now the number of posts should be increased to reduce inland vessel accidents."

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