

# Foreign help sought to find AN 32

By Chamila Jayaweera

The government is seeking foreign assistance in the form of diving equipment machinery or manpower to find the ill-fated AN-32 aircraft which crashed into the sea off Negombo last Wednesday, officials said.

Meanwhile one aircraft and a helicopter are continuously operating along the coastal belt from Puttalam to Colombo extending to an area of 30 nautical miles day and night in an attempt to find any evidence that could unravel the mystery, they said.

Air Commodore Jayalath Weerakkody, Director of Operations of the Sri Lanka Air Force, said all items that had surfaced upto now and believed to be from the plane had been sent to the Government Analyst.

But two opposition MPs Pradeep Hapangama and

Jayalath Jayawardena, who visited the crash site in a trawler claimed they did not see any navy boats or helicopters patrolling the area.

Mr. Hapangama also suggested the government should get foreign assistance to find the plane. He also criticised the Air Force Commander for going by the stories of fishermen, when he should be aware of exactly what had happened himself.

The Deputy Director of Operations, Prasanna Ratnayaka, said Air Force morale had not been affected by the crash. SLAF planes had recorded a total of 60,000 flying hours after the incident.

Commodore Weerakkody, also suggested the possibility of the Bubble window next to the navigator's seat having burst open at the point of the crash in trying to explain why Navigator J. C. Martenstyn's head and part's of his body would have floated up, wher

none of the others did so. "The navigator may have been looking out to see through the patch of bad weather", he said.

When questioned as to why there had been 73 kg of cigarettes aboard the plane he said they had been requested by the Police Headquarters to be transported to Palaly for the large number of police officers there. The four large boxes of cigarette had been taken to the Ratmalana airport at 4 a.m. by the two policemen accompanying them, the seals broken and checked with the aid of a metal detector, before being loaded aboard the plane at 6 a.m.

Colombo Radio officials told The Sunday Times that although they had broadcast the message they had received from the SLAF after Radar lost contact with the plane, to merchant vessels in the vicinity, they had not received any information from them.