

More city areas flooded

Situation in central districts worsens, slightly improves in north



A woman helps an elderly man to higher ground yesterday in a swamped village in Harirampur upazila in Manikganj, one of the 26 districts worst-hit in a month-long spell that left tens of thousands of people homeless or marooned.

PHOTO: STAR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Floodwaters swamped fresh lowlands in the central districts including Dhaka and its environs, but marked recession in the northern districts except for Sirajganj and Pabna yesterday.

Flooding in central Munshiganj, Manikganj, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Rajbari and Tangail deteriorated as the Padma and its branches burst their banks, stranding lakhs of people in their submerged homes.

The southern district of Barisal and offshore island of Bhola reeled under the deluge.

In the northern region, major rivers began to recede in the wake of petering out of torrential monsoon rains in the upstream hilly regions across the frontiers.

This year's flooding has already claimed the lives of 75 people and affected more than 50 lakh others in 26 districts. The government has recently decided to deploy troops in the worst-hit districts.

The low-lying areas of the capital, especially on its eastern fringe, were smarting from snap in road links, forcing people to use boats.

The swollen Turag and Sitalakhya rivers sent large swathes in Meradia, Manda, Trimohini, Demra and Kamrangirchar and some areas of Mirpur, Aminbazar and Kalyanpur under water.

The situation in Shariatpur took a serious turn as the fierce-flowing Padma and the Kirtinasha flowed 90 and 60cm above their danger marks yesterday, submerging fresh areas in the town.

Some 500 houses were devoured by the Padma yesterday when about 10 lakh people became marooned. About 20 km road was completely destroyed, they added.

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Amini backs down on polls issue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A minor coalition party led by Fazlul Haq Amini yesterday backed down on the Netrokona-3 by-election issue that had opened an apparent discord in the ruling alliance.

Amini, chairman of the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), told The Daily Star that he would support any candidature for the constituency, nominated by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, although his party decided to field Ehtesham Sarwar Chowdhury.

"But I must say if Ehtesham Sarwar Chowdhury gets four-party nomination, it will be easy to win the polls."

At a press conference on Thursday, the IOJ announced the candidature of Ehtesham for the by-election to Netrokona-3 seat that fell

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AL to complain to speaker about JS bodies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) will lodge protest with the speaker against what it calls formation of parliamentary standing committees in violation of the constitution and the Rules of Procedure.

The AL will write a letter to Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar after gazette notification of the committees, asking him to take necessary steps on the issue, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid told The Daily Star yesterday.

Depending on the speaker's move, the AL will think of nominating its deputies for the bodies, he added.

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PHOTO: AFP

Thousands of Iraqis demonstrated against the US-led occupation and the new Governing Council yesterday after Friday prayers in Baghdad.

Bush, Blair defend Iraq campaign to sceptical world

REUTERS, Washington

With embattled British Prime Minister Tony Blair at his side, President Bush on Thursday stood by his assertion that Iraq was trying to reconstitute its nuclear weapons programme and declared: "We won't be proven wrong."

A joint White House press conference intended as a celebration of the US-British special relationship and the swift overthrow of

Saddam Hussein, was marked instead by questions about post-war chaos in Iraq, disputed intelligence and British terror suspects held in a US military jail.

Blair defended British intelligence on Saddam's alleged weapons of mass destruction which they used to justify invading Iraq, saying he believed it was "genuine."

Bush called it "sound" and lashed out at "the skeptics," who

have focused on a now-discredited line in his State of the Union speech about Iraq's attempt to get uranium from Africa. The White House says it should not have been included in Bush's address.

"He (Saddam) possessed chemical weapons and biological weapons," Bush said. "I strongly believe he was trying to reconstitute his

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SSC grading in fog

STAR REPORT

Parents, teachers and students are still confused about the grading system introduced in 2001.

Many guardians made phone calls to various newspaper offices, asking for clarification of the merit judgement system after this year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination results were published Wednesday.

"We suffered from uncertainty until we understood our daughter's result fully," said Afifa Rahman, a guardian of Dhanmondi. She said even teachers have no clear idea about the new system.

The education ministry issued a

notification for some changes in the grading system on January 4 this year.

The system, introduced in 2001 to measure students' aptitude in the SSC, will be applied in the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations this year.

The new grading system includes an additional letter grade A- (minus) with 3.5 grade point (GP). A student with an F (below pass marks) grade in any subject cannot enrol in any college. However, the highest Grade Point Average (GPA) remains the same.

Individual results in public examinations will be published in GPA on the basis of a seven-step letter grading instead of six steps.

The steps are A+ for GP 5.0 (80-100 marks), A for GP 4.0 (70-79), A- for GP 3.5 (60-69), B for GP 3.0 (50-59), C for GP 2.0 (40-49), D for GP 1.0 (33-39) and F for GP 0.0 (0-32).

Previously, the steps were A+ for GP 5.0 (80-100), A for GP 4.0 (60-79), B for GP 3.0 (51-59), C for GP 2.0 (41-50), D for GP 1 (33-40) and F for 0.0 (0-32).

Examinees who will not get F grade in any subject and whose GPA is at least 1.0 will be considered passed.

In the current method an examinee has to secure pass marks individually in every part of the

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Bomb blast at Kushtia BNP leader's house: One killed

UNB, Kushtia

One person was killed and two others were injured in a bomb blast at the house of a local BNP leader at village Majdiar in Daulatpur upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

The dead was identified as Abdul Hannan, 35, son of Abu Bakr, of Jamalpur village.

Police and locals said the explosion occurred at around 3 am when Hannan and two of his associates -- Shamsul, 40, and Kamal Hossain, 30 -- were making bombs at the house of upazila BNP vice president Jahangir Alam, leaving the three seriously injured.

The injured were admitted to the Kushtia General Hospital and later shifted to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital where Hannan died at noon.

The explosion blew off the CI sheet roof of the room.

Police visited the area in the morning. None was arrested till yesterday evening.

Indefinite bus strike in Barisal from today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Bus owners and workers go for an indefinite strike in the district from today protesting attacks on their vehicles by tempo drivers and workers at different points on Barisal-Banaripara-Swarupkati road yesterday and the day before.

The tempo drivers and workers went on the rampage following an accident on the road on Wednesday that left five people, including a tempo driver, killed. The accident occurred in the morning when a speeding bus collided head on with a tempo.

Immediately after the accident, the tempo drivers and workers swooped on some passing buses on Barisal-Banaripara road and damaged those.

Yesterday, the angry tempo drivers and workers damaged some buses and injured a few bus drivers and workers at Banaripara. They also put up barricades at different points on Barisal-Banaripara-Swarupkati road and declared that

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NCB capital deficit snowballs

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The net capital deficit of the four nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) increased by Tk 125 crore to Tk 6,204 crore in the first three months of this year.

Classified loans of these banks rose by Tk 467 crore to Tk 12,653 crore in January-March, according to banking sources.

The deficit bloated because of an increase in provision shortfall against their default loans.

The finance ministry does not yet have any plan to re-capitalise the banks. Neither are the NCBs strong enough to earn more to fill up the deficit.

"We are now examining the net deficits of the banks so that we can take some steps in the near future under the NCB reforms programme," says a finance ministry official.

The net deficit of Sonali Bank rose by Tk 158 crore to Tk 2,736 crore. This is equivalent to 35 per cent of the bank's total loans and advances of Tk 5,487 crore.

It faced a provision shortfall of Tk 2,376 crore during the period.

Janata Bank's capital shortfall shrunk by Tk 79 crore to Tk 1,412 crore in March. But its classified loans increased by Tk 137 crore to Tk 2,685 crore, representing about 29 per cent of its total loans.

Agrani Bank's capital shortfall in the first three months of this year increased by Tk 41 crore to Tk 1,172 crore. Its classified loans increased by Tk 33 crore to Tk 3,177 crore, claiming 38 per cent of total portfolio. The bank had a provision shortfall of Tk 959 crore.

Rupali Bank's capital shortfall increased by Tk 6 crore to Tk 832 crore during the same period. Its classified loans increased by Tk 32 crore to Tk 1,303 crore which is 31 per cent of its total portfolio.

The bank faced a provision shortfall of Tk 328 crore.