

Opened-up Farakka triggers flash floods

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Late water flow of the Ganges basin and opening-up of Farakka Barrage have swollen the Padma and Mahananda rivers, triggering flash floods in the downstream areas of Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi.

According to official reports, nearly 80,000 people were marooned in 20 unions in six upazilas of the two districts and some 35,000 people were affected by river erosion in the last 48 hours.

"The Indian authorities open up the gates in June every year to ease immense water pressure over there," said a flood expert.

"The Ganges basin's floodwater entered the country rather late this year. But it is not an unusual situation and will continue for a few more days," said Selim Bhuiyan, executive engineer of the flood control and forecasting centre. "But the situation in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj may further deteriorate," he added.

The Padma and the Mahananda were flowing 7cm and 11cm above

their danger levels yesterday.

The flood-affected upazilas are Paba, Godagari, Charghat and Bagha in Rajshahi district and Sadar and Shibganj in Chapainawabganj.

Floodwater entered Rajshahi city through Dargah Ghat sluice gate and different sewerage lines connected with the Padma, inundating some areas of Bulonpur, Police Line, Dargahpara and Sagarpara.

The Water Development Board (WDB) opened all the sluice gates on the Rajshahi Town Protection Dam for diverting water to the low-lying areas for irrigation and for cleaning the drains in the city.

In Shibganj upazila, about 50,000 people were marooned after 80 per cent areas of four unions — Paka, Ujirpur, Monakosa and Durlopur were flooded. At least 20,000 people in Char Majhardar, Haripur, Khidir-pur, Taranagar, Saldigha Adarsha-gram and Khanpara in Paba were affected. Another 20,000 people were affected in Bagha upazila during the last 24 hours.

The shank of spur No. 1 of the Tk 120 crore project for protection of the left bank of the river Padma has been washed away by severe river erosion.

All the gates of the Farakka Barrage were opened by the Indian authorities on Saturday to lessen the heavy pressure of onrush of water into the Ganges from upstream, sources in Rajshahi WDB said.

"India has controlled the Ganges with surface treatment of its right bank from Farakka to Nimitita to divert the mainstream of the river to the left. That is why it is directly hitting the left bank in Chapainawabganj," said Abdul Mannan, an executive engineer of Rajshahi WDB.

Meanwhile, India has undertaken a Rs 300 crore project to protect the left bank of the Ganges in its territory. "The Indian project, if implemented, will cause more damage to us, creating a completely new situation with new problems, and the whole project might have to be redesigned," Mannan said.



President Iajuddin Ahmed poses for photograph with recipients of Tonatuni Award 2003 after they called on him at the Bangabhaban yesterday.

Telecoms act

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internet service providers (ISPs). The telecoms act states that breaching individual privacy by tapping or eavesdropping on telephone conversations between two persons is a punishable offence as it infringes civil rights.

Although the intelligence agencies cannot legally eavesdrop on telephone conversations, allegations have long been there that they monitor and tap phone calls illegally. But they cannot at present use the information derived by such means as evidence in the court of law.

However, after its amendment, the intelligence agencies will be able to manoeuvre freely to listen to individual phone calls, but e-mails and produce tapped and e-mailed messages before court as evidence.

Sources said the intelligence agencies have been able to persuade the Prime Minister's Office to bring changes to the telecoms act, citing the rise in terrorist activities in Bangladesh and September 11 terror attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, US.

The agencies also convinced the telecoms ministry to change the telecoms law. The ministry has recently held a series of meetings

with the Ministry of Law and BTRC.

The agencies want a change in the subsection of Section 30 of the telecoms act, which deals with protection of privacy of telecommunications, by incorporating the words, put here in italics: "to ensure protection of the privacy of telecommunications; subject to the national security laws".

The government came under scathing criticism at home and abroad after the move became public last week.

The Paris-based journalists' rights organisation Reporters sans frontières (RSF) has expressed concern at the proposed changes, saying these would legalise invasion of privacy and undermine freedom of expression.

Stop changes in CPC, bar council order '72, lawyers demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a meeting of Sammilita Ainjibi Samannaya Parishad, a lawyers' body, yesterday demanded immediate withdrawal of the Civil Procedure Code (CPC) Amendment Act and the Bar Council Order 1972 Amendment Bill.

The demand was made at the meeting held at the Supreme Court Bar Association hall.

The speakers said the CPC Amendment Act, to be effective from October 1, will deny people of justice. It will also create controversy about judges as the amendments to all the sections, except 115, are anti-people, they added.

They termed the Bar Council Order 1972 Amendment Bill 'undemocratic' and said it will slash constitutional rights of the autonomous Bar Council.

Chaired by Abdul Baset Majumdar, the meeting was attended by, among others, Ozaer Farooq, Eusuf Hossain Humayun, Mahub Ali, Subrata Chowdhury, Sahara Khatun, Shahabuddin Ahmed, Khaleda Sarkar and Saikat Acharya.

BNP refutes

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Education Secretary Shahidul Alam issued the circular to keep administration free from what the education ministry called political and party influences.

But Siddiqui described it as an attempt to undermine the rights of ministers and lawmakers.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar and Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain protested the opposition lawmaker's allegation and demanded expunction of the statement from parliament proceedings.

"The BNP is a pro-people party and did not come to power with assistance of any government official. People gave the BNP a clear mandate," said Anwar, also BNP vice-chairman.

The chief whip dubbed Siddiqui's speech as contrary to the constitution and the Rules of Procedure.

Siddiqui walked out of the Jatiya Sangsad as he was denied the floor to speak on Education Minister Osman Farruk's statement that justified the circular as an instrument to discipline postings and transfers in line with public service rules.

Enclosing recommendations of any minister or lawmaker with the applications is a misconduct and a punishable offence, the education ministry said in a press release yesterday.

Such a practice runs counter to Section 20 of the Government Employees (Conduct) Rules, 1979, and is a punishable offence under Section 3(B) of the Government Employees Discipline and Appellate Status, 1985, while Section 30 explains that political influence in government service is prohibited, says the press release.

Last night, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law Ministry submitted to the House three reports on as many bills sent to the committee earlier for scrutiny.

The bills are the President's (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Bill, 2003, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2003 and the Bangladesh Legal Practitioners and Bar Council (Amendment) Bill, 2003.

The House is likely to take up the bills for passage at today's sitting.

Not guilty yet

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a bomb-throwing case No. 82/4/2001 with Sutrapur Police Station on April 25, 2001 under the Public Safety Act.

Police arrested Jamal on April 28 and produced him before a court that sent him to custody, with a one-day remand.

The jail authorities sent Jamal to the correction centre on June 30, 2001.

The BLAST investigation revealed that police filed the FRT (Final Report True) on July 3, 2001, which found Jamal innocent and appealed for his release to the Public Safety Tribunal-4. The judge ordered to free Jamal on November 18, 2002 that to this day goes unheeded.

A resident of the city's Sayedabad area, Jamal used to live by pulling rickshaw.

Death threat

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his youth wing Jubo Dal and an outlawed organisation. Four 'extremists' also attended it, said the identical letters sent by an unidentified person.

"I inform you of this murder plan through letters sent by post as I feel insecure to meet you in person," the letter said.

Asked about this, Tayebur admitted he and the three others received the letters on Sunday. "I am not afraid because Allah will save us," he said.

Lobi, Martuza and Shachchu also said they are not at all frightened.

None of them has filed any general diary with police in this regard.

ADP projects left in catch 22 state

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dozen projects.

On the other hand, the planning ministry sources claimed there were only 26 projects awaiting clearance from the Executive Committee for National Economic Council (Ecneec).

As many as 260 ADP projects have not yet been sent to the planning ministry even two months after the budget, they said.

So, where have all the projects gone?

"The planning ministry has a tendency to send the project proposals for clarification back to the departments under different ministries repeatedly and does not get the total picture," explained an official.

The planning ministry complicates the process by seeking details of every project, although they are sent after scrutiny by the departments and ministries concerned, said officials.

The ADP of the current fiscal envisages approval of 336 projects. Since the July budget, Ecneec has approved only 43 projects and the finance ministry approved another six or seven of less than Tk 10 crore.

Ecneec should ideally approve all

the ADP projects in the first few months of the budget to ensure their timely implementation, but the present situation clearly indicates yet another disappointing ADP implementation in the offing.

Frustrated by only 30 per cent implementation of the ADP in the first six months of the last fiscal, the planning ministry issued some directives to speed up work.

Last month, it decided to hold two Ecneec meetings a month — one on the first Wednesday every month and the other on the third Wednesday.

The prime minister will chair the Ecneec meeting to approve new projects and the finance minister to approve revised projects.

But different ministries and departments have not sent adequate projects to justify two Ecneec meetings a month.

In the current fiscal, Ecneec held only three meetings — one chaired by the prime minister and the others by the finance minister — clearing 43 new and revised projects until yesterday. In the last fiscal, Ecneec held nine meetings and approved 105 projects.

The planning ministry estimates

that it will take at least 20 Ecneec meetings to clear all the projects of this fiscal.

"Approval is only part of the whole process that causes delay in implementation," said an official, wishing not to be named. "And the process may take years to complete."

A source cited the example of a project to build a four-storey annex to the Supreme Court premises. The project was cleared by a pre-Ecneec meeting on September 6, 2001, processed by the law ministry in a revised proposal, sent to the Ecneec secretariat only last month and approved last week.

Slow implementation of the projects results in non-utilisation of a significant portion of the ADP. In fiscal 2001-02, the Tk 19,000 crore ADP was revised down to Tk 16,000 crore. Yet, the government utilised only Tk 14,090 crore.

In fiscal 2002-03, the ADP was revised down to Tk 17,100 crore from Tk 19,200 crore. But the government failed to utilise even the revised target, sources said.

The 2003-04 ADP has been set at Tk 20,300 crore.

Hasina: Step down

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The procession paraded through Paltan intersection, Press Club, Shahbagh intersection, Elephant Road, Science Laboratory intersection and Kalabagan before reaching the square at Dhanmondi.

The AL chief, on an open jeep, waived to people who lined both sides of the streets and many waived back to her.

The procession paralysed the city traffic leaving all sorts of vehicles stranded in clogged streets.

Law-enforcers were deployed in force to keep peace during the demonstration.

Hasina in her speech urged all pro-liberation forces to join hands against the government and forge a united movement against the government for its 'quick fall'.

She accused the government of politicising all branches of the administration, especially the judiciary and the civil administration.

The parliament has emerged dysfunctional due to the autocratic style of the alliance government, she said, adding the opposition was gagged, even in parliament.

"The Khaleda-Nizami government will have to face trial for destroying hard-earned democracy," she said.

She called upon people to observe the countrywide dawn-to-

dusk hartal on September 25.

Hasina said the present government was killing the leaders of her party and the people were unnerved by the atmosphere of panic.

"About 24,000 leaders and workers of the Awami League have been killed under the alliance rule," she said.

She said abduction of businessmen and schoolchildren turned into a regular feature, exposing the nosedive in law and order.

Hasina excoriated the government policies of closing down mills and factories and putting thousands of workers out onto the streets.

She said government employees were being promoted on the basis of their political beliefs.

Hasina levelled charges of widespread corruption against the prime minister, saying in only 23 months of governance she and her sons amassed a huge wealth running into crores of taka.

"They are smuggling money out of the country," she alleged.

She extended her party's support to the daylong countrywide general strike called by the Jute, Cotton and Textile Mills Employees Action Committee for today against the government policy to close down mills and factories.

Swedes say 'no' to euro

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the debacle in his country.

"We are confident that the Swedish government will choose the way forward to keep the euro project alive in Sweden," the Commission said.

Sweden's influential daily Dagens Nyheter said the referendum outcome was a rejection of what Swedes' view as Stockholm's elitism, headlining its front page "A slap in the face of power" alongside a picture of a grim-faced Persson.

"The 'no' camp has won a crushing victory, and it's a sock in the jaw to the political and economic elite in Sweden," editorialist Henrik Brors wrote.

He noted that 80 per cent of members of parliament had supported Swedish entry in the eurozone, reflecting a gaping chasm between the views of elected officials and the people they represent.

In Rome, the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, attributed the outcome of the vote to the fear of change in Sweden, which is enjoying one of the strongest growth rates in Europe.

"The Sweden which produces... fought to get into the euro," he told the newspaper La Repubblica.

"But it didn't succeed due to fear of the new among public opinion. Meanwhile, the Swedish 'no' vote also dampened hopes of convincing other EU members still outside the euro zone — notably fiercely euro-sceptic Britain — to accept the currency.

Sunday's vote leaves Sweden, as well as Britain and Denmark, outside the European single currency, and damages the chances of Britain's pro-euro camp. Danish voters rejected the currency before it went into general circulation.

Killing of Arafat

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other parts of the world," he said on "Fox News Sunday," speaking from Baghdad.

Israel's vice premier, Ehud Olmert, said killing Arafat was an option after a decision in principle by Israel's security Cabinet on Thursday to remove the Palestinian president.

Powell said on CNN's "Late Edition" he had learned from the Israeli government that it had no current plans to remove Arafat. But he called Olmert's statement unhelpful to Bush's "road map" for Middle East peace.

Israel Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom yesterday dismissed comments by Olmert.

But Olmert's words, following an Israeli decision in principle to expel Arafat from the West Bank, drew anger in the Arab world and blank incredulity in Europe.

"Assassination is an extremely dangerous thing," Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told reporters during a visit to France.

"If the Israelis assassinate Yasser Arafat and if everyone assassinates their adversary, then the world would be in total chaos," he said, through a translator.

The European Union also counsels caution in the handling of Arafat, who denies accusations that he has fomented violence.

"We do not expect it (assassination), EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana told reporters in Brussels.

"It does not go through our imagination that that can take place,"

Solana said. "I do not believe that anything of that nature is going to take place."

He stressed he had neither sought nor received guarantees that Arafat, confined to his ruined West Bank headquarters in Ramallah for more than a year, would not be assassinated.

The Quartet of diplomatic patrons of an Israeli-Palestinian peace "road map" — the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations — would meet in New York next week on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session.

Arafat has denied orchestrating violence in a three-year-old Palestinian militant revolt against Israel for independence.

Shalom, responding to Olmert's comments, told foreign journalists at a briefing:

"There will be no immediate action. It's not official policy of the Israeli government (...). We don't speak about killing (him). We didn't speak about it before, and we don't speak about it today."

Apology

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offended at Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's declaring a BNP newcomer an 'undeclared lawmaker' in a Faridpur constituency and Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar's observation on absence of running of the House in the absence of the main opposition.

A Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker took the floor on a point of order and pleaded for a ruling from the speaker on the issue.

Shah Md Ruhul Kuddus, the Jamaat MP, expressed outrage at the AL's threat of non-participation in the parliament session and also in the upcoming conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in Dhaka.

Kuddus said, "The AL lawmakers remained absent from 70 sittings in a row and joined the 71st to keep their membership."

In his ruling, the Chair termed the CPA conference billed for an October 4 start very important for Bangladesh and hoped the main opposition party would take part in it considering the prestige of the country.

Sayedee

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election for Pirojpur-1 constituency null and void for submitting false statements on his poll expenses and violating other election rules.

Sources in Jamaat said the order has embarrassed the right-wing party that proclaims honesty as being the foundation of all its activities.

Top leaders of the party have reportedly discussed ways to overcome the image crisis caused by the order.

Cancun talks collapse

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Bangladesh Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, also coordinator of 49 LDCs, told the meet that the LDCs would want special safeguard measures without conditions or limitations on product coverage for protecting their domestic agriculture.

There is now a danger that the talks failure could hasten the formation of regional trading blocs and country-to-country deals, which will hit the poorest nations hardest.

The breakdown of talks was the biggest defeat for trade liberalisation since a chaotic meeting in Seattle in 1999 was rocked by violent street protests and a similar revolt by poor countries.

Some countries criticised the meeting's chairman, Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbies, for pulling the plug too quickly as some progress was reported on the thorny issue of massive EU and US subsidies to domestic farmers.

Poor nations boasted they had scored a political victory in proving they would no longer be bullied into a bad deal by the dominant trading powers, the United States and Europe.

For once, a coalition of developing countries, led by Brazil, China and India, worked as a bloc to counter-balance the weight of the much richer US, EU and Japan.

"It was not possible to get a concrete result," said Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, "but we think that we have achieved some important things: firstly, the respect for our group."

The deadlocks centred on the four so-called "Singapore issues", pushed by Japan and the European Union, which were first proposed at an earlier meeting in 1998.

The four issues are: How countries treat foreign investors, standards for anti-monopoly and cartel laws, greater transparency in government purchasing, which might help foreign companies win public sector business and trade facilitation, making things like customs procedures simpler.

The issues were passed to Cancun from delegates at the last WTO meeting in Qatar because they were contentious.

Developing countries balked at including these issues in the trade talks, especially investment rules, arguing that the complexity of negotiating in completely new areas would leave them at a disadvantage compared to the rich countries who would be able to take advantage of their greater technical expertise.

"We have always alerted people that unless they listen to the developing countries ... this is what will happen," said Malaysia's trade minister, Rafidah Aziz.

US and EU negotiators complained that Brazil, India and other key developing countries had brought more rhetoric than proposals to the negotiating table.

They also said it would now be very tough to meet the WTO's own deadline for a comprehensive reform in world trade by the end of 2004. The World Bank says a good accord could add \$520 billion to world incomes by 2015 and lift 144 million people out of poverty.

But Ugandan delegate Yasphal Tondon said: "The blame for the collapse must go to the Western countries, because they insisted on putting their issues first."

Dave Timms of the British development lobby group, the World Development Movement, agreed. "The collapse of the talks was the only option for the developing countries — walking out was better than the deal on the table. It is the EU that must take responsibility for the failure."

The European Union was joined by some other rich nations in pressing for new rules on investment, competition, government procurement and cutting red tape that holds

Cricket

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winning the toss in the day-night encounter, lost opener Mohammad Hafeez in the sixth over when pacerman Tapas Baisya had him caught behind for two.

Yasir Hameed, who made 116 in the first game, and Youhana, who scored 106 in the second, put the Pakistani innings back on track during their 77-run stand for the second wicket.

Bangladesh once again squandered some easy chances including two attempted run outs to allow the pair to settle in.

Yasir holed out at long on from the bowling of left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique for a 66-ball 40, including three boundaries.

Youhana added another 36 with his skipper in quick time before being bowled by Mushfiqur Rahman in the 31st over. He made 65 off 74 balls, including nine boundaries.

In the last overs, Shoab Malik chipped in with two towering sixes in his 18-ball 21 as Pakistan added 83 runs in the last ten overs, mainly thanks to Inzamam.

Abdul Razzaq also contributed with 15 but became one of three wickets to fell in the 49th over when he was bowled by Baisya, who finished with his best one-day figures of 4-56. The bowler will have a chance to grab a hat-trick when the teams move to Rawalpindi for Thursday's fourth match.

Pakistan lead the series 2-0. They won the first match at Multan by 137 runs and the second at Faisalabad by 74 runs.

HPSP

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spent on vaccines, contraceptives and essential drugs and the rest will be utilised during the period of extension proposed.

A letter was sent to the World Bank recently seeking extension of the HPSP for full utilisation of the funds, newly appointed Health Secretary Sarwar Kamal said.

Sources pointed out that the government had to seek this extension as it failed to launch the much-talked-about Tk 9000 crore Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPPSP) on July 1 this year.

The HNPPSP was scheduled to be launched if the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) approved it. But it was yet to be sent to the ECNEC for approval, a health ministry source said, seeking anonymity.

This resulted in blocking of funds for salary of about 24,000 family planning field workers since July 1 this year, the source added.

4 forest staff

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"We went to Fatikchhari forests on board a jeep and a pick-up to visit the plantations and gardens owned by our department. While we were visiting a roadside garden at