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Incessant rainfall over past 3 days Mudslides kill 30 in three Ctg hill districts

Star Report

At least 25 people, including 10 children, were killed in mudslides caused by incessant downpour in the Rangamati and Bandarban hill districts Wednesday, according to district officials.

The deaths raise the toll to 30 during the last two days in three hill districts including Khagrachhari.

District administration officials, reached over telephone last night, confirmed that 21 of the victims died in Rangamati while four others were killed in Bandarban district. Four persons were injured in the two districts on the day.

Earlier on Tuesday, three people were killed in Khagrachhari while two others died in Rangamati.

Heavy rainfall for the last three days in the region severely disrupted roadlinks, caused mudslides and flash floods in the three hill districts and adjoining areas.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) of Rangamati told The Daily Star over telephone that eight of the victims were killed in Reserve Bazar, one in Viveki, both under the municipal area, 11 in Kaokhali thana while another person was killed in Kaptai.

The mudslides in the town area occurred at around 12.15 pm while it took place in the early morning hours in the villages of Kaokhali thana, he added. Two injured people were admitted at the Sadar Hospital.

The Deputy Commissioner of Bandarban said that a pregnant woman along with three of her daughters were killed when a huge chunk of earth caved in on their hillside hut in the outskirts of the town. Three others of a nearby house were injured.

He added that one of the seriously injured persons was shifted to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital while another was admitted at a local hospital.

The Rangamati ADC informed this correspondent that two villagers were also killed under similar circumstances on Tuesday in Manikchhari.

Three others were also killed in Khagrachhari on the same day.

Dhaka-Sylhet road link snapped Flood situation takes a serious turn

The country's three major rivers, flowing well above their respective danger marks, swelled further yesterday due to incessant rains, deteriorating the overall flood situation in different northern and hilly districts, reports UNB.

All the rivers registered sharp rises in the 24 hours ending at 6 am Wednesday and most rivers were flowing above their danger levels, according to Flood Warning Centre.

The Met office recorded 483 mm rainfall throughout the country in the last 24 hours.

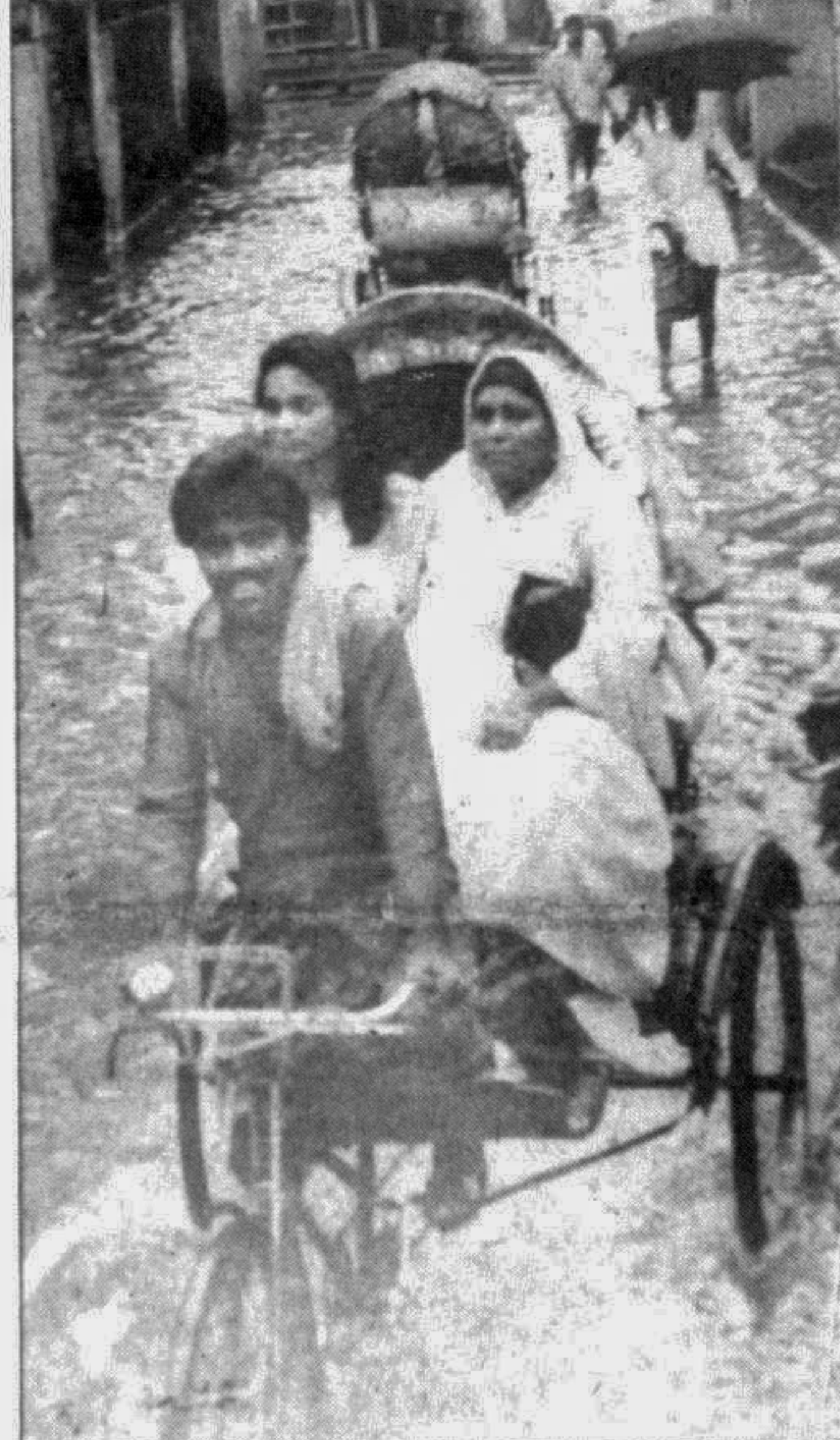
The roadlink of Sylhet with Dhaka and the rest of the country had once again been snapped as flood waters submerged the Khowai bridge near Shantaganj yesterday.

The rivers of the northeastern districts swelled again as a result of incessant rains and on-rush of water from the hills.

The low-lying areas of Zakiganj, Companyganj, Biswanath, Balaganj, Jayantapur, Sadar, Kanaighat and Gowatghat thanas, Sylhet district were inundated due to continuous rainfall and onrush of water from across the border.

Local Hydrology Department sources said the Surma was flowing 8 cm above the danger mark at Sylhet town, 107 cm at Kanaighat and 43 cm at Sunamganj.

The water level of the Kushiara was 42 cm above the danger mark at Baniabazar and 122 cm at Amalshid in



Different parts of the city's low-lying areas were submerged following yesterday's incessant rain. — Star photo

Last chance for democracy, says Benazir

ISLAMABAD, July 21: Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto said on Wednesday that national elections planned for October would be Pakistan's last chance for democracy, unless vote-rigging was eliminated.

She said that without the removal of the drug money she alleges her rivals used to buy votes in elections in 1988 and 1990, the political stalemate of the past six months could persist, raising the spectre of a military takeover.

"These elections are Pakistan's last chance at democracy," she said in an interview at her Islamabad home. "Pakistan's democracy is extremely fragile."

The Army has ruled for 24 of the 45 years since Pakistan came into being.

Bhutto has campaigned for fresh elections for months, saying the polls that brought her arch-rival Nawaz Sharif to power, after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed her as Prime Minister in 1990, had been rigged and many votes bought.

She said that only election rigging and the power of drug money to purchase votes could prevent her, the Muslim world's first woman Prime Minister, from sweeping back to power.

Bhutto refused to discuss Sharif as a serious competitor in the elections, Pakistan's third poll in five years.

"Nawaz Sharif is a part of the past," Bhutto told Reuters three days after her rival had bowed to pressure from her and from the military and dissolved parliament, setting mid-term elections for early October.

But Sharif was in fighting mood.

"I will inflict a crushing defeat on the party that is bent upon breaking Pakistan," said Sharif, who accuses Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party of aggravating the recent crisis by joining with President Ishaq Khan to topple him.

"I consider it may sacred duty to beat this party in the elections," he told reporters late on Tuesday.

Asked why she had urged Ishaq Khan to exercise the very power that she condemns, in order to sack Sharif, Bhutto said, "The law still gives this power."

Meanwhile, caretaker Prime Minister Moeen Qureshi has begun consultations to form a cabinet of non-political and neutral figures in the coming days, officials said today.

Qureshi, 63, has said he would have a small but effective team to assist him in the task of organising "transparently free and fair" elections for the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies in October.

Similar cabinets are to be set up in Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Provinces, where new governors and Chief Ministers have already been inducted.

Sources said Qureshi, an economist of international repute, was expected to form his cabinet around technocrats, former bureaucrats, retired military officers and judges.

Unlike the previous 38-day caretaker government, with a record 60 members, which was installed in April after then president Ghulam Ishaq Khan dissolved the National Assembly, Qureshi's lineup is expected to be no more than a dozen.

The caretaker government has reportedly started a reshuffle of officers in the administrative machinery, amid calls by politicians to place neutral men in posts.

Police open fire on Cong-I protesters in Calcutta: 9 killed

CALCUTTA, July 21: Nine persons were left dead and 20 others seriously injured in police firing as the 'barricade' of Writers Buildings by the Youth Congress-I led by Ms Mamata Banerjee erupted into violence in the metropolis today, according to the Police Commissioner, Tushar Talukdar, reports PTI.

The Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu told newsmen that 59 police personnel, including the Additional Police Commissioner and seven assistant commissioners suffered injuries when rampaging Youth Cong-I activists attacked them with bombs, pipeguns and brickbats at three points in the city.

Knowledgeable political circles here said that today's casualty figure was probably the highest in the city during a single day's demonstration in the 17 years of left front rule.

Meanwhile, the West Bengal Youth Congress-I today said that it would observe tomorrow as 'condemnation day' to protest against the killing of nine persons by police firing.

The former Union Minister, PR Dasrinish said that the decision was taken at an emergency meeting in the city nursing home where the YC-I chief, Ms Mamata Banerjee, MP, was admitted after she fell unconscious during the siege of Writers Building programme.

JS probe body on Irrigation Ministry First meeting held in cordial atmosphere

By Staff Correspondent

The special parliamentary body to probe into the Opposition allegations of corruption against the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, Water Development and Flood Control and the minister concerned held its first meeting yesterday.

All the legislators of the 15-member body, headed by Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, were present in the meeting, Parliament Secretariat sources said.

Members of both benches agreed the first meeting of the body was held in a cordial atmosphere.

According to committee sources, the meeting discussed the procedures of conducting the probe.

The members are scheduled to sit again at 10:30 this morning to discuss the terms of reference.

The Jatiya Sangsad (JS), while constituting the probe on July 13, authorised the committee to decide its own terms of reference on the basis of a general guideline proposed by Deputy Leader of the House Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury.

According to that guideline, the House committee will conduct its investigations on the basis of the allegations made on the floor by Awami League (AL) MP Tofael Ahmed on June 26, reply to the allegations by Agriculture Minister Majid-ul-Huq the same day, and the Speaker's observations about the matter in the House.

Meanwhile, the Opposition members of the committee yesterday told the meeting that it would be difficult to conduct a neutral investigation with Majid-ul-Huq still heading the ministry.

They argued that employees of the ministry would hesitate to hand over documents to the committee which might go against the interests of the minister, an MP who attended the meeting told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity. They demanded resignation of the minister for the time being.

On the other hand, the treasury bench members in the committee refuted the Opposition arguments saying that the officials of the ministry were obliged to hand over to the probe body whatever documents sought under the rules of procedure of Jatiya Sangsad.

The treasury bench members, referring to Rule 202 of the rules of procedure, also told the meeting that the provision ensured the job security of the officials by barring committee members from disclosing their identities.

They also argued that more than one parliamentary standing body, including the public accounts committee, had been frequently asking for different files of different ministries since the BNP came to power, but no complaint has so far been made by any Opposition member that any ministry had showed reluctance to produce documents.

BCSIR activities must be geared to people's needs: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday called for integration of scientific and technological researches with the industrialisation process of the country for better results, reports UNB.

"Competition is the main feature of the market economy introduced by the present government. To survive in a competitive market, technological advancement is necessary," she pointed out.

The Prime Minister was addressing the scientists and officers of the Bangladesh Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) at the Science Laboratory here yesterday morning.

Begum Zia went to different laboratories of the divisions of Glass and Ceramics, Institute of

Faction of JP women's wing backs Huda

Star Report

The crisis in the Jatiya Party yesterday deepened after a faction of its women's wing joined hands with the dissident leader former Speaker Shamsul Huq Chowdhury.

The women's group, led by Secretary Toufika Karim, welcomed the move by party veteran Shamsul Huda Chowdhury and urged the dedicated female workers to rally behind him.

In a signed statement, the women's wing secretary urged the party workers to make the August 1 meeting at the Ershad residence of Chowdhury a success.

Shamsul Huda Chowdhury, the former Speaker during the Ershad regime, issued a press statement urging like-minded

AL resistance day today

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League (AL) will observe a 'resistance day' today to protest against alleged government corruption and repression of opposition activists.

Abdus Samad Azad and Zillur Rahman, acting president and the general secretary of the party, in a joint statement issued to the press last night, said the government had resorted to repression of the opposition activists following its 'failure' to run the country. They called on the people to make today's agitation a success.

BEA concerned at govt's compromise with SKOP

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Employers' Association (BEA) yesterday expressed its deep concern at the recent 'compromise' accord reached between the government and the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) and termed the government's commitment to introduce a national minimum wage as 'alarming.'

The BEA urged the government to place details of the understanding with the SKOP leaders before the Tripartite Consultative Committee (TCC), a forum formed by the government earlier this year with representatives from both workers and employers' organisations.

"It is unfortunate that the government has chosen to compromise on a number of points ignoring their legal and other implications," said M Anis Ud Dowla, president of the association, in a statement.

He was referring to the understanding reached between the government and the SKOP last Sunday on the eve of a threatened 48-hour general strike.

"We would like to reiterate the dangers of forcing wage fixation as a public issue," he added. "For any country seeking investment, to compromise on such a fundamental aspect of the market economy sends the wrong signals and gives the impression that laws and regulations remain only on paper, to be violated depending on exigencies."

Russian space agency to defy Moscow, supply rocket engines to India

MOSCOW, July 21: Russia's space agency Glavkosmos will defy the Foreign Ministry and fulfill its contract to sell rocket engines and technology to India, the Glavkosmos Managing Director said today, reports AFP.

Alexander Dunayev told the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee that the Foreign Ministry had no right to modify the 350-million-dollar contract, Interfax news agency reported.

Addressing the Foreign Affairs Committee today Dunayev said the contract to supply India with two engines and accompanying technology could not "contribute to the building of any weapon of mass destruction."

The United States, Dunayev also alleged, is helping south Korea to build a military missile. Dunayev said he had proof of this assistance.

Russian Parliamentary Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov earlier today criticised the decision to cancel part of the space technology deal with India as 'a national disgrace,' Interfax reported.

Khasbulatov told lawmakers that he and President Boris Yeltsin had promised Indian leaders during separate visits to New Delhi earlier this year that the deal would go through, despite Washington's objections.

The chairman of the Russian Space Agency, Yuri Koptev, had told a news conference in Washington on Monday that Moscow would sell the two rocket engines to India but not the accompanying technology.

The contract will undergo certain modifications, Koptev, quoted by Itar-Tass, said.

Nikolai Semyonov, a senior space agency official was also angered by the concession and predicted that the move would roll back plans for military co-operations with India.

"This can lead to a chain reaction and the loss of the entire southeast Asian market," Semyonov, quoted by Interfax, said on Tuesday, adding that India could seek millions of dollars in compensation for the decision.

Semyonov accused the Russian Foreign Ministry of acting at US behest to "eliminate" Russia from the missile market.

Another report says, Russia expects to "partially" cancel an agreement to deliver missile engines and technology to India, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Boris Kustovskii said Tuesday.

"We have suspended the application of some points in the agreement," worth 350 million dollars, under which Russia was to deliver cryogenic engines and transfer technology to India's space industry, he said.

BADC to sell off all irrigation equipment

Star Report

The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) will dispose of all its irrigation equipment through tender or auction by the end of this year.

According to highly placed sources, the government has decided to sell the equipment, worth over 207 crore taka, to fulfil the conditions of an agreement signed with the World Bank for implementation of the National Minor Irrigation Development Project (NMIDP).

Under the said agreement, the BADC was supposed to clear the stock of equipment by selling those at a reduced price by 31 March 1992. The time was later extended to December last year.

However, since a large quantity of equipment were lying unsold at the godowns of the BADC, the Agriculture Ministry has recently decided to dispose of the stock through tenders followed by auctions.

The equipment include deep tubewell (DTW), shallow tubewell (STW), power pumps and spare parts.

The sale programme through tenders will continue until 30 Sept, while the lotteries will be cleared through auctions by 31 December this year.

According to BADC, the stock at different godowns until

Customs at ZIA recover antiques worth Tk 1 crore: 3 arrested

By Staff Correspondent

The Customs Intelligence officials at the ZIA International Airport Tuesday midnight recovered a large number of antiques and curios approximately valued at Tk 1 crore and arrested three passengers, including a foreigner in this connection.

The precious ancient relics were seized from the luggage of three Hong Kong-bound passengers, including a Kuwaiti national, at the departure lounge of the airport at about 12:00 Tuesday night.

The recovered 71 items include 36 bronze and black

NEWS BRIEFS

10m gunny bags for flood-hit Americans
Jute Minister ASM Hannan Shah has said that Bangladesh is ready to supply ten million gunny bags to help the distressed people of the United States in combatting the devastating floods. He said the Jute Ministry is ready to send one million gunny bags to the United States within next twenty-four hours, said a PID handout, reports UNB.

Dhaka contesting for FAO DG post
Bangladesh is contesting for the post of the Director General of Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). Nine countries including Bangladesh have put candidates in the election to the post of chief executive of the 159-member FAO, an important agency of the United Nations with its headquarters in Rome. Senegal, Chile, India, Columbia Greece and the Netherlands are among other contesting countries. Bangladesh has nominated former Home Secretary Muhammad Salahuddin to contest the election in the FAO which will take place during its General Conference due in November, reports UNB.

Saifur in Kuwait
Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman arrived in Kuwait Tuesday evening on a two-day official visit, according to a message received here yesterday. He was received at the airport by Kuwait Deputy Premier and Minister for Finance and Planning Nasser Abdullah Al-Roudhan and ambassador of Bangladesh M Rahul Amin, reports BSS.

ALCEC meet August 1
A meeting of the Central Executive Council of Bangladesh Awami League will be held on August 1 at 4 pm at its central office here. Awami League chief and leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina will preside over the meeting, reports BSS.