

SAVE DHAKA



Such queues by people of all ages and sexes for collecting scarce drinking water from wayside DCC hydrants are common in the capital. — Star photo

Padma, Jamuna devour vast areas in 3 dists

A sudden rise in the water levels of the country's major rivers caused erosion of crop fields and homesteads along their banks, affecting several thousand people.

Reports reaching in Dhaka yesterday said vast tracts of crops were engulfed in char areas of Manikganj, Sirajganj and Gaibandha districts where at least 661 families were rendered homeless in last three days.

The Manikganj correspondent of UNB said at least 560 families had lost homes in the gorge of swelling Padma and Jamuna in three thanas of the district in 72 hours till yesterday noon.

More than one square-kilometre of cultivable land in 9 unions of Daulatpur, Shibhalaya and Harirampur thanas was eroded during the period, officials said.

Besides, standing crops including aush, groundnut, sugarcane and jute on about 15,000 acres were completely damaged in the affected areas.

Thana officials of Daulatpur said erosion by the river Jamuna took a serious turn due to sharp rise in the water level. They confirmed that 230 families left homeless in the thana.

The BIWTA sources said the water level rose by 8 cm at Aricha, 11 cm at Nagarbari and 5 cm at Daulatpur points in 24 hours till 6 am Sunday. Normal

ferry services between Nagarbari and Aricha are being disrupted due to massive erosion in Nagarbari Ghat area, they said.

In Sirajganj, standing crops including boro, groundnut and sesame on 17,000 acres of land in seven thanas of the district went under water due to rise in the water level in the rivers Jamuna, Karotoa and Baral and breach in an embankment.

According to the Water Development Board sources, the Jamuna at Sirajganj rose by 11 cm in 24 hours till 6 am Sunday.

Meanwhile, at least 111 families of 17 villages in Chouhalli and Kaptipur thanas of the district were left without homes due to the erosion by the Jamuna during the period, TNO office sources said.

The other affected thanas are Raiganj, Tarash, Ullapara, Shahjadpur and sadar.

In Gaibandha, the char areas of Fulchhari, Sundarganj and Sadar thanas went under water due to sudden increase of water in Brahmaputra, Teesta and Ghagot rivers.

A vast tract of standing crops were damaged in the affected areas, including Mollarchar and Kamarjani in sadar thana, Erendabari, Fazlupur and Jigabari of Fulchhari and Belka and Chandipur of Sundarganj thana.

Malaria, diarrhoea

the exceptions of Sylhet and Jamalpur, the other affected districts have been identified malaria-endemic zones.

Last year, 1278 deaths were caused by the malaria parasite, of which 696 were confirmed while the other 582 were suspected malaria cases.

This year, around 60,000 more people were affected by the malaria parasite, but mostly of the plasmodium vivax type — which generally does not pose a serious threat to life.

One malaria expert of the Health Directorate explained, there are four types of malaria, namely, plasmodium vivax, plasmodium falciparum, plasmodium malariae and plasmodium ovale. Among these, only the first two types exist in Bangladesh. And, again, only the falciparum type could cause death, she said.

Addressing a press conference late last month, Dr A Mannan, assistant director of malaria and parasite disease control (M&PDC), mentioned that the problems in facing up to the malaria threat include improper selection of insecticide, lack of trained manpower, financial constraints, drug resistance by certain strains of the germ and its carriers and lack of institutional linkage.

One Health Ministry official told The Daily Star that until recently DDT was widely used before the chemical was banned for its harmful side-effects. Its place has been taken by malathion, another insecticide which has proved rather effective.

Last year, 20 thousand tons of malathion were sprayed on experimental basis to kill seven species of the anopheles mosquito, which are the main vector or carrier of the disease in our country.

He said due to the shortage of adequate doctors and labora-

tory technicians in the Thana Health Complexes (THCs), this year, proper blood tests of all suspected malaria victims could not be conducted. The official added that the health workers were under tremendous pressure in facing the influx of people suffering from fever. Even those with ordinary fever are apprehensive that they may have contracted malaria.

Regarding the treatment of malaria, he said, treatment was being rendered in three stages — uncomplicated malaria (UM), treatment failure malaria (TFM) and severe malaria (SM).

Meanwhile, the Health Directorate Control Room report said, so far 548 people have died of diarrhoea and 66,075 others were affected following the outbreak of gastro-enteritis in 15 districts. Of the total deaths, 234 died during the last 30 days.

The highest number of diarrhoeal deaths, 226, was recorded in Noakhali with all its six thanas being badly affected.

The other most vulnerable districts, especially at this time of the year, are Luxmipur (129 reported deaths), Pirojpur (46), Maulvibazar (29) and Chittagong (28).

The report showed that as many as 21 people died of diarrhoea in various parts of the country within a 24-hour span on May 22 alone.

Dr Aftabuddin, Deputy Director of Communicable Disease Control, observed, "We cannot expect an eradication of diarrhoea without alleviating poverty".

There are abject lack of safe drinking water, hygienic sanitation facilities and health care awareness — which all contribute to diarrhoeal diseases. "We lack these because we are poor", Dr Aftabuddin pointed out.

Benazir won't amend blasphemy law

ISLAMABAD, May 28: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto assured Pakistani Muslims today that blasphemy would remain a crime punished by death, reports Reuter.

"All Muslims feel the same about the honour of the prophet," she said in a speech. "We will not amend the law but plan some procedural changes so that it is used according to the tenets of Islam."

Pakistani fundamentalists have been leading a campaign, including a general strike on Saturday, to keep blasphemy a capital offence.

The law came under attack from local and international human rights groups after two Christians, one a 14-year-old boy, were sentenced to death. They were acquitted by a higher court.

Benazir said the only changes needed were to protect weaker member of society from misuse of the blasphemy law.

"Foreigners coming to this country should also have to respect the honour of our prophet and Pakistani law," Benazir said.

53 killed in fresh fighting Chandrika vows to hit back hard at LTTE

COLOMBO, May 28: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga vowed to hit back hard at Tamil guerrillas as fierce fighting today killed at least 53 soldiers and rebels, the military said, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga, 49, said her government had yet to begin a fullscale war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) but when it did it would be with "all seriousness" to restore peace.

Her remarks came as security forces wrested control of a camp decimated by Tamil Tigers in eastern Sri Lanka where bitter fighting left more than 50 people killed or wounded, military spokesman Sarath Munasinghe said.

The LTTE killed at least 22 soldiers and wounded another 10 out of a total of 180 soldiers during a fierce three-hour battle, he said. Most of the troops

who retreated have now returned to the camp, he said.

Munasinghe said LTTE radio monitored by them gave the names of 21 of their cadres killed, including the self-styled lieutenant colonel Vinodan from the Tiger unit of Vishalan.

Another 10 LTTE men were killed by troops at Well Oya further to the north, raising to 53 the number of people killed in a day of bitter fighting. There were unconfirmed reports that the LTTE had taken prisoner some 10 soldiers.

Kumaratunga who addressed reporters at the inauguration of the island's first ever national information centre made no reference to the latest fighting but said 50,000 people have died in the island's ethnic conflict.



President Chandrika Kumaratunga addressed media personnel yesterday at the opening of Sri Lanka's first National Information Centre in Colombo where she vowed to hit back hard at the Tamil rebels. — AFP/UNB photo

Prokrichi slams BCS-Admin tactics

By Staff Correspondent
The Prokrichi-BCS Central Action Council said yesterday that the people want an immediate end to the government's 'shameless submission' to the bureaucracy.

The Council was of the view that the country could be freed from the 'bureaucratic terrorism' forever by amending the government's age-old Rules of Business and separating the judiciary from the executive.

In an emergency meeting held at the Engineers' Institution Saturday night, the Council observed that the BCS (Admin Cadre) Association had undermined the people's representatives by raising a demand to seek an apology from them, says a press release.

It further observed that sending a faxed message to the Prime Minister, while she was in South Korea, for meeting their 'illegal demands' was part of the BCS (Admin) cadre's attempt to blackmail the government and tarnish the image of the country.

The Council drew the attention of the people, the political parties and professional groups to the 'chaos' created by a section of government officers over the transfer of a particular Secretary.

"This cadre took advantages of many illegal opportunities by creating artificial crises in the past," said the Council and mentioned the examples of "illegal promotions" of 19 Joint Secretaries in 1991 and "illegal mass promotion" of 654 officers in February 1992.

With Dr M A Majed in the chair, the Council's emergency meeting was attended, among others, by A N H Akhter, Md Abu Henia, Javed Iqbal and Md Ibrahim Mia.

Social summit

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C Carriere and Executive Director of Khan Foundation Rokshana Khandaker.

Foreign Secretary Feroz Sobhan presented the keynote paper while State Minister for Planning Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan presided.

The Foreign Minister said that the World Social Summit recognised that distribution of wealth can only come from deliberate choice of policies. "This has brought into focus the role of policy planners and coordinators in the implementation of the national programmes for social development," he added.

Mostafiz said that the government is looking for ways to create effective frameworks for wider implementation.

The Minister said that the present democratically elected government had attached high priority to the Copenhagen Social Summit and assured that there was no dearth of political will for that.

"But the government cannot do it alone. It will need cooperation from all quarters," he said.

Interview of DU 'Ka' unit examinees begins June 4

The interview of first year (honours) admission test of Science and Biological Science faculties of Dhaka University under 'Ka' unit will begin on June 4 at the faculty office, reports UNB.

7 killed

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to his injuries at the DMCH yesterday.

UNB from Chittagong adds: Four people were killed in separate incidents in different parts of the district yesterday.

Police said an auto-rickshaw driver was killed and four others, including two minors, were injured when a truck hit the three-wheelers at Agrabad yesterday morning.

In another incident, an unidentified young man was crushed under the wheels of a speeding truck at Mithadighirpar in Satkania thana at about 12 noon.

Police said two women — Krishna Rani, 40, of Rauzan thana and Alama Begum, 16, in Fatikchhari thana — allegedly committed suicide by taking poison.

New Unicef policy guideline

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economic Forum, Unicef and the ILO at the Sonargaon Hotel at 7 pm today.

BGMEA President Redwan Ahmed, MP, said that the meeting has been arranged to get the views of the international buyers on both the total and phased elimination of child labour from the garment factories.

The announcement of the Unicef directive was published in a New York Times (NYT) report on May 25. It quoted the Unicef director as saying that the role of the organisation "is to work on behalf of children worldwide, so it should take the lead in raising issues of concern and applying the same standards it would apply to others."

Carriere pointed out that the new directive is the "direct result" of the adverse public reaction created by a recent television documentary aired by a US network showing the Unicef buying surgical equipment made with child labour in Pakistan.

A former US Peace Corps director, Unicef chief Carol Bellamy said that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, clearly forbids exploitation of children. Bangladesh also has ratified the convention.

The NYT report said that the Unicef annually buys about 380 million dollars in supplies from both industrial and developing countries for its own use and for fund-raising activities through the sale of greeting cards.

It added that an estimated 200 million children of school-going age are employed in industries around the world, with a large percentage in South Asia.

India is thought to have some 60 million children in full-time work and not in school, and Indian suppliers

earned about 2.5 million dollars in UNICEF contracts in 1994. Pakistan and Bangladesh, where child labour is also common, are also UNICEF contractors, with Pakistan earning 1.14 million dollars and Bangladesh 778,352 dollars from such business in 1994, the report pointed out.

At international meetings, it added, India has led a campaign against the introduction of child labour issues in international trade, calling it a new form of colonialism and unacceptable interference in its policies.

The new Unicef directive is likely to put pressure on other international organisations, which also spend millions of dollars on local supplies, to follow suit, the report said.

The Unicef directive said: "Unicef shall purchase products only from those companies that comply with the existing national labour laws and regulations with regard to their employment practices (minimum age of employment, wages, working conditions)."

It added that all purchase orders and bidding documents are to include a statement of the agency's principles on protecting children from work that interferes with schooling or is "harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

Carriere said that the local suppliers to Unicef would be given a "very short grace period" to comply with the new directive, provided the children are "clearly" not working in an exploitative and hazardous environment.

On the meeting at the Commerce Secretary's office, he said: "Looks like there is a willingness on all sides to make some compromises and the BGMEA is willing to extend its deadline (for eliminating child labour) to find an ad-

equate solution." The phasing-out period would depend on the actual number of children presently working in the garment sector and the support programme that would be needed to rehabilitate them.

On the proposed meeting with representatives of the international buyers today, Carriere, who is also expected to attend, said that attempts would be made to learn about the views of the buyers about the 'gradualness' of the scheme to eliminate child labour from the garment sector.

Redwan Ahmed, on the other hand, pointed out that at yesterday's meeting the Commerce Secretary said that the Secretary, Primary Education has offered to let the government primary schools be used for the education programmes during off-school hours.

Approaching the World Food Programme to back a food-for-education scheme for the retrenched children was also discussed at the meeting.

Ahmed, however, said that the BGMEA would continue to implement the decisions of its May 17 extraordinary general meeting (EGM) and that the association would complete the registration of child workers in all member factories within the next one month. The BGMEA yesterday announced the formation of 25 inspection teams, each consisting of seven members and headed by an executive committee member.

2 dacoits

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The injured villagers were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital while the bodies were sent to the Narayanangj General Hospital for autopsy. The conditions of Ashrafuddin and Shahabuddin were stated as critical.

The Midnight File

Iranian intellectuals seek political freedom

NICOSIA, May 28: A group of 100 Iranian intellectuals has petitioned the Tehran government to allow more political freedom and urged Iranians to become more active in politics, sources said today. Ebrahim Yazdi, a leading member of Iran's only opposition group, told The Associated Press that the appeal called on authorities to guarantee freedoms promised in the Islamic republic's constitution, reports AP.

Cannes film festival awards declared

CANNES, France, May 28: Yugoslav director Emir Kusturica won the top award at the Cannes film festival here today for his film "Underground". The best actor award went to Jonathan Pryce for his role in "Carrington", while Helen Mirren, also a Briton, took the prize for best actress for her role in "The Madness of King George", reports AFP.

Arafat Peres to agree on expanded self-rule July 1

RABAT, May 28: Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO chief Yasser Arafat on Sunday renewed their commitment to meeting a July 1 target date to agree on the second phase of a Palestinian autonomy plan, reports AP.

After overnight talks mediated by King Hassan II that ended early Sunday, Peres and Arafat pledged in a joint statement to agree by July 1 on "the redeployment of the (Israeli) army, security arrangements, elections and the transfer of authority" in West Bank towns.

The leaders said they would seek to establish "a durable peace and to avoid that the

peace process be threatened again."

Terror attacks have slowed talks toward advancing beyond phase one of the September 1993 peace agreement, which allowed the Palestinians autonomy in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

Peres earlier told Israel radio that during the talks, "The atmosphere was demonstratively friendly." He praised Hassan's mediating role, saying it was "giving impetus to the process."

An Arafat spokesman, Marwan Kanafani, said in a telephone interview that the Israelis also "agreed to facilitate the transfer of goods and people across the border."

The Israelis had placed limits on those movements as a result of terrorist attacks.

Zia murder case

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nation of President Ziaur Rahman in a failed army coup.

Sources said committee headed by an Additional Superintendent of the CID Police has been constituted recently to see whether preparation and submission of the report was at all possible or not.

Bosnian FM

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pavement.

Miranda Sidran, a Bosnian embassy spokeswoman in Zagreb, Croatia, said Serbs fired a missile at 6:30 am that downed the helicopter carrying Ljubijankic and three other Bosnian officials. All four and the crew were killed, she said.

Muslim-led government forces in Bihac are battling rebel Serbs from Bosnia and neighboring Croatia as well as Muslims who have broken with

the Sarajevo government.

Ljubijankic, in office less than a year, was the highest Bosnian government official killed in more than three years of war.

In Sarajevo, a standoff between Serb warriors and French peacekeepers ended after the Serbs withdrew overnight. French marines resumed control of a disputed bridge and a French soldier held by the Serbs escaped his captors unharmed.

Across Europe, officials held crisis talks to decide whether to stand tough or back off — and possibly pull their UN soldiers out of the 3-year-old Bosnian war in a humiliating retreat.

New NATO air raids seemed unlikely as the world debated its next move.

Quake

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In the settlement of Okha, 70 km south of the Cape, the walls of many houses cracked in the tremors. The balconies fell from two five-storey houses but there was no major destruction, Interfax said.

A special ministry plane left Moscow early today with a rescue team and equipment aboard, Interfax said. Camps have been set up for those evacuated from the distress zone and teams of Sakhalin medics and rescue workers left for the area, according to ITAR-Tass.

Rescue teams from Khabarovsk and the Kamchatka Peninsula were also in Neftegorsk.

Two aftershocks followed the initial quake soon afterward. Okhinsky district governor Nayil Yarulini told The Association Press.

"I believe that the damage will be rather big," Yarulini said, speaking by telephone soon after the quake. "I have been living in this area for 42 years and it's the first earthquake of such force."

"People left their houses and went out in the streets for fear of more shocks, but there is no panic," he said. The temperature was about 0 degree Celsius.