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ANNOUNCEMENT

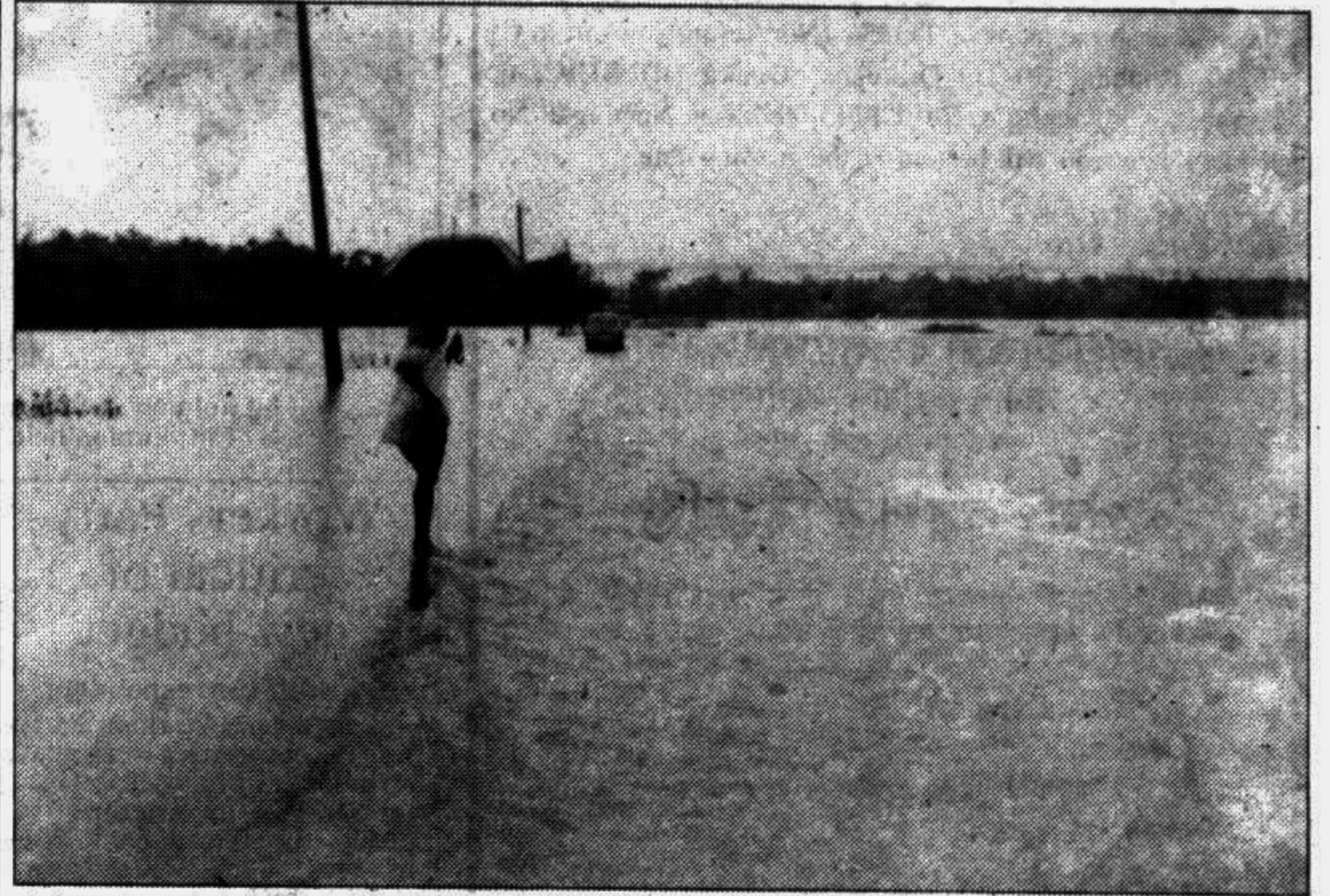
From today we introduce a two-page editorial section — pages 4 and 5. The second page entitled FOCUS, to be published everyday except Fridays, will contain articles on the development challenges facing Bangladesh and also on the current social, cultural and literary issues. FOCUS will replace our single-subject feature pages — Education, Environment, Women, Law, Science, etc. — with an array of write-ups on the above subjects. What we are aiming at is to have a variety of articles everyday on current challenges facing us, rather than a weekly cycle of issue-based pages. Now contributors can expect to have their valuable write-ups published far more quickly than before. This change, we hope, will provide more interesting reading material for our valued readers. Let us know what you think of FOCUS, and give us suggestions as to how WE CAN SERVE YOU BETTER. The regular international page will appear on page 8.

Opposition's JS boycott to cross 90-day limit today

By Staff Correspondent

One hundred and fortyfour Opposition MPs' consecutive absence from the House would reach the 90-day constitutional limit when the session resumes today after a three-day of break. Article 67 (1) (b) of the Constitution says: "A member of Parliament shall vacate his seat — if he is absent from Parliament, without the leave of Parliament, for ninety consecutive sitting days." Of the 144 MPs, 91 are from the Awami League, 31 from the Jatiya Party, 19 from the Jamaat-e-Islami, one each from the NDP, the Workers Party and the Gano Forum, Parliament source said. The absence of jailed former President HM Ershad and detained AL leader Hemayetullah Auaranga is involuntary while Aktaruzaman Chowdhury Babu of the AL had earlier sent application seeking leave of absence from the House, sources pointed out. Three of the six JP MPs, who recently joined the ruling BNP, already returned to Parliament Thursday while three others may return today. Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, Sharfuddin Khasru and Abdul Majid attended the session while Mahmudul Hassan, Paritosh Chokraborty and Hafizur Rahman Pramanik are likely to join today. Mostafizur Rahman MP who has dissociated himself from the AL may also attend the session today. Maulana Obaidul Huq of the IOJ briefly attended the session on July 11 last to participate in a discussion on controversial writer Taslima Nasreen. The opposition members started boycott of the House on March 1, 1994 and on the opening day of the present budget session their absence reached 89 days. The boycott was in demand for a caretaker government for holding general elections. Sessionwise break-up of the opposition members' absence is: 13th session— five days, 14th session— six days, 15th session— 25 days, 16th session— 10 days, 17th session— 19 days, 18th session— 19 days and the present 20th session— one day. Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali is likely to inform the House tomorrow about the absence of the members, Parliament sources said. He has already prepared a speech and a list of the absentee members, the sources added. They could

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Sylhet-Sunamganj road link has been snapped due to inundation of half-a-kilometre stretch of the road at Jangail. — Star photo by Iqbal Siddiqui

Constitutional crisis

Experts differ on provisions

By Asiuazzaman

Lawyers and politicians belonging to different parties agree that there is an impending constitutional crisis but gave different interpretations of the relevant Constitutional provisions. Barrister KS Nabi, a member of the Awami League advisory committee has said at present Parliament is not properly constituted. According to the Rules of Procedure of Parliament, there should be an Opposition in the House. "Since there is no opposition parties in Parliament, the House is not properly constituted," Nabi explained while talking to The Daily Star yesterday. He said this is a 'crippled' House since it lost its capability to amend the Constitution or to impeach the President in such a situation arises. According to the Constitution, the House needs two-thirds (221 votes) majority to amend the Constitution or to impeach the President. Barrister Nabi pointed out the Speaker has the discretion to extend the 90 days' time-limit subject to appeal by the absentee members. He, however, said the Speaker violated the Constitution by rejecting the resignation letters of the Opposition members. The AL leader said it is not possible to accommodate the caretaker government formula in the Constitution under the existing framework. "Now we have to take a political decision, keeping aside the Constitutional provisions," he added. Only a consensus among political parties can defuse the prevailing impasse. If the parties reach an agreement, that can be ratified in the next Parliament, he pleaded. The highest court of the country can legalise the people's will for greater national interest, he observed. Asked if such a consensus would amount to taking away of people's right by political parties in an extra-constitutional way, Nabi said, "People's right cannot exist without the political parties." He also said that when the Chief Justice was given executive power, the move harmed the basic structure of the Constitution. But the Eleventh Amendment made the change legal. So, there is no harm in amending the Constitution to form a caretaker government to supervise the next general elections. Amending provision is also a Constitutional provision, he added. Ruling Party's standing committee member and Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia contradicted Barrister Nabi's observations and said Parliament cannot change the basic structure of the Constitution by a two-third majority. It needs a referendum but if the opposition parties were in Parliament, things could have been easier to resolve. Quoting the judgement of the Eighth Amendment case, See Page 12 Col 1

Manzur murder

Col Kamaluddin remanded

By Court Correspondent

Lt Col (ret'd) Kamaluddin Bhuiyan, arrested Saturday in connection with the Maj Gen Manzur murder case, was produced in the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court yesterday and remanded in custody for two days. The CID police had prayed for a five-day remand. No bail petition was moved on behalf of Kamaluddin. So far, four persons, all retired army officials, have been arrested in connection with the Manzur murder case.

6 die in Savar bus plunge

SAVAR, June 18: Six people were killed and several others injured in a bus plunge into a roadside ditch near Turag Bridge on the Dhaka-Aricha highway in Savar today, reports UNB. Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at about 2 pm when a Dhaka-bound minibus skidded off the road and fell into water. Local people recovered six bodies from the water till See Page 12 Col 3

41 die, 15 lakh marooned

By Staff Correspondent

The death toll rose to 41 and over 15 lakh people were marooned as the overall flood situation deteriorated in 5 of the 8 affected districts yesterday. The situation deteriorated in Manikganj, Sirajganj, Pabna, Jamalpur and Netrakona districts with inundation of fresh areas. But there was no report of any death. Sylhet, Moulvibazar and Sunamganj bore the brunt of the current flooding with 25, 9 and 7 deaths respectively but situation in the three districts remained static yesterday as downpour stopped after three days. Local officials however confirmed 16 deaths in Sylhet and 4 in Sunamganj. The Monu, the Kushiara and the Dholai rivers in the three districts, swelled also by hill waters from upper reaches, were flowing above danger marks. Rail communication between Sylhet and rest of the country was snapped following damage of the Monu bridge. There were moderate to heavy showers in most parts of the country yesterday. Downpour in the capital swamped many roads and inundated low-lying areas. Rain varied from 165 to 55 mm, Met office said. Rail links between Dhaka and Chittagong, Sylhet, Noakhali and Chandpur were suspended for about six hours as soil under a bridge near Ashugani station was eroded due to heavy downpour, said our Brahmanbaria Correspondent. The train communication was however restored at 6 pm. According to our correspondent's report, Sunamganj was the worst-hit with nearly 10 lakh people marooned in nine thanas. Sylhet's road and telecommunication links with Jamtapur, Comapanganj, Gowainghat and Kanaighat See Page 12 Col 3

Water talks with Delhi Saturday

Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haider will arrive in Dhaka Friday to discuss with his Bangladesh counterpart, Farooq Sobhan, the outstanding water sharing issue, reports UNB. For years, the issue on water sharing of the common rivers, including the Ganges, has been an irritant in Bangladesh's relations with India. At the weekly regular press briefing yesterday (Sunday), a spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the meeting between the two Foreign Secretaries would be held Saturday. The spokesman failed to give a positive answer of a question whether the talks would cover other bilateral matters. The spokesman also told a questioner that the composition of the delegations of the two sides were yet to be determined. He said that the meeting would be a continuation of talks on the water sharing issue between the two foreign secretaries held in New Delhi in May 4 and 5. 17 Japanese cos to invest \$130 m. Prospects of huge Japanese investment in Bangladesh are now brighter following better acquaintance of the investors with the business climate here, reports UNB. A spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated this yesterday during a weekly press briefing. He expressed the optimism explaining the outcome of last week's visit of Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs to Bangladesh. He said some 17 Japanese companies, who received registration between April 1, 1994 and May 31, 1995, would invest 130 million US dollars in Bangladesh, aspiring rapid industrialisation of its age-old agrarian economy. During his June 10-12 tour, Hakuo Yanagisawa called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman and See Page 12 Col 3

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- NEWS BRIEFS**
PM's public meet cancelled
 A scheduled public meeting of the Prime Minister was cancelled yesterday due to inclement weather, officials said. Begum Khaleda Zia was scheduled to address the meeting at Choudhagram in Comilla district in the afternoon.
Special Affairs Secy to visit hill dists
 From Staff Correspondent
 CHITTAGONG, June 18: The Special Affairs Secretary, Dr Fazlul Hasan Yusuf, is expected to pay a four-day visit to the hill districts of Rangamati and Khagrachhari from June 22, according to an official source.

Moudud regrets, agrees to revise book

Star Report

Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed has 'deeply regretted' the controversial observations against former president H M Ershad in his book published recently. Moudud read out a two-page statement at IP's presidium meeting last night explaining his position about the book titled 'Democracy and Challenges of Development'. Party sources said that Moudud reiterated his allegiance to JP chairman Ershad and said that he would ask the publisher to stop selling the book immediately. He also assured the presidium that the book would be revised and the controversial observations and comments about Ershad would be dropped in its future editions, the sources said. Moudud also told the presidium that he would personally convey his regrets to the jailed party-chief for the comments which created an unfortunate situation in the party. JP presidium — the highest policy-making body of the party met for the second day yesterday evening with acting Chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury in the chair. During the four-hour deliberations, a number of presidium members including Begum Raushan Ershad, Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Sirajul Hossain Khan and Zafar Imam expressed their views, deploring the comments against Ershad in the book. Moudud, himself a presidium member, clarified his position through the statement which was recorded in the proceedings of the meeting. Moudud said that the book was written in continuation of two others published earlier. He stated that he wrote the book as an individual, not as a politician. Moudud also mentioned that the book was written much earlier, but the time of its launching was 'only a matter of days' away. See Page 12 Col 8

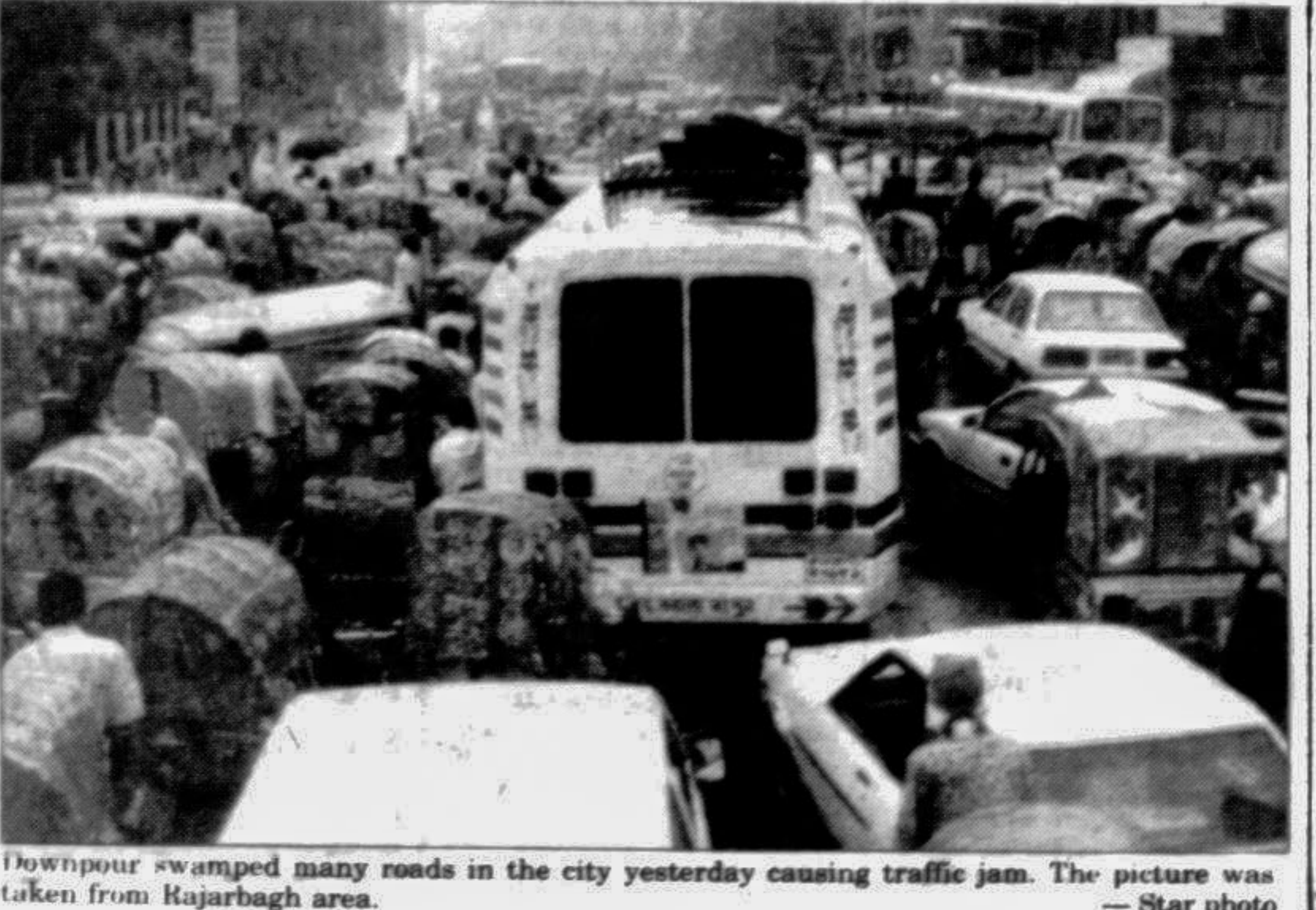
Nat'l emergency preparedness centre awaits approval

By Rashed Mahmud Titumir

The WHO-sponsored National Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR), which might be designated later as Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific, is likely to be approved by the inter-ministerial body shortly. A WHO technical mission that visited Dhaka recently, however, said that low level of implementation of EPR programme in Bangladesh might not be 'acceptable' to the donors, resulting in a decreased inflow of assistance. Following the devastating cyclone that lashed the southern region of the country in April, 1991, WHO proposed to establish a Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response in Asia and the Pacific and Bangladesh government expressed its interest in hosting the centre. Subsequently, at the 11th meeting of health ministers of South East Asia region organised by WHO in Dhaka in November, 1993, Bangladesh was accepted as the host country. According to a highly placed source in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the ministry has received comments from the relevant ministries on the terms of reference (TOR) of the proposed Centre, sent earlier to them after the approval by it and the TOR would be placed before the inter-ministerial body comprising representatives of the ministries of relief, health, finance, home, defence and foreign affairs shortly. Earlier, at a meeting between the health minister and the director, Emergency Humanitarian Action (EHA) programme of WHO, it was agreed that Bangladesh would provide a building to house the centre as well as support for local staff and administrative cost and WHO would provide technical assistance and programme support cost needed by the Centre to operate its various projects and programmes, the source said. Based on the recommendations of the EHA mission, the health ministry issued an order for renting a building to house the Centre, facilitating its immediate functioning, till the construction of a building at Mohakhali to house it permanently. According to sources, the minister also assured an allocation of 250,000 US dollars. The amount will be completed by the balance of the Italian contribution to WHO for EPR activities in Bangladesh since release of the fund is not likely before September this year. The mission and minister also agreed that if necessary, funds for immediate commencement of construction could be borrowed from the regular WHO programme budget, subject to repayment by the government, the sources added.

Computer inventor Atanasoff dies

MONROVIA, Maryland, June 18: John Atanasoff, who invented the world's first computer only to have to wait 30 years for official recognition, died of a stroke at the age of 91, informed sources said, reports AFP. Atanasoff, who died Thursday in Monrovia, Maryland, built his computer, the first to use the binary system, in 1939 when he was a professor at the University of Iowa. However, his invention was quickly superseded by the Electrical Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC) which was built in 1945 by John Mauchly and Presper Eckert and was considered at the time as the first computer. Four years earlier Mauchly had visited Atanasoff and had examined his computer. Atanasoff's computer was finally recognised in 1973 when a federal judge annulled the ENIAC patent held by the Company Sperryrand, saying that the computer had been modelled on Atanasoff's.



Downpour swamped many roads in the city yesterday causing traffic jam. The picture was taken from Rajarbagh area. — Star photo

Russia halts offensive, peace talks with Chechens today

BUDENNOVSK, Russia, June 18: Russia's military commander in Chechnya ordered his troops today to halt all military actions as part of a deal to save hundreds of hostages in the southern town of Budennovsk, reports Reuter. "General (Anatoly) Kulikov, the head of federal forces in Chechnya, gave the order to stop all military operations on the territory of Chechnya from 8 pm (1600 GMT)," Itar-Tass News Agency said. Tass was quoting Deputy Nationalities Minister Vyacheslav Mikhailov, appointed by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin as head of a government delegation at new peace talks with Chechen rebels due to start on Monday in the capital Grozny. AP adds: Chechen rebels holding some 2,000 hostages began releasing their captives Sunday after the Russian government agreed to halt combat operations in Chechnya. The first batch of nearly 100 hostages, mostly women and children, left the hospital where they were being held and were taken in ambulances to nearby clinics. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said an agreement had been reached to halt combat operations in Chechnya in exchange for the hostages' release. Large crowds of relatives and friends stood on the street corners looking for loved ones among the freed captives. Some people cried and others shouted out names of relatives and friends. Russian officials said another group of women and children were to be released later Sunday under the agreement with the gunmen. Talks were continuing on pulling back troops from around the besieged hospital to defuse the four-day standoff. In a telephone conversation with rebel leader Shamil Basayev, Chernomyrdin agreed to "stop military activities and bombardments" in exchange for the hostages' release. Basayev said he would free 100 women and 100 children immediately, and the rest later, Chernomyrdin told reporters after the conversation. A spokesman for the government See Page 12 Col 1

Biman's Ctg-Dhaka flights disrupted

From Staff Correspondent
 CHITTAGONG, June 18: The flight schedule of Biman Bangladesh Airlines on the Chittagong-Dhaka route was disrupted for the second day today as two aircraft bound for Dhaka were forced to come back due to inclement weather. According to airport sources, one ATP and another F-28 aircraft which took off for Chittagong airport at 2:15 and 2:50 pm respectively, returned here failing to land at Zia International Airport. These two flights again took off for Dhaka after 5 pm. Ovi sent to jail. By Court Correspondent. Former Chhatra Dal (ICD) leader Golam Faruk Ovi was sent to the Dhaka central jail under the Special Powers Act by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court. Ovi was arrested by the Detective Branch of police from the city's Iskaton area on Saturday. He was produced before the CMM's Court in the city yesterday where he was refused bail and sent to the jail to be detained for 120 days.