

Tk 3270 cr agri credit programme undertaken

The government has undertaken a Tk 3,270 crore agricultural credit programme to strengthen the post-flood agricultural rehabilitation activities, reports UNB.

Of the total amount, Tk 1,500 crore will be disbursed as crop loan and it will be expanded, if necessary. The rest will be disbursed for fisheries, livestock, poultry and procurement of other agricultural inputs and equipment.

Banks and other financial institutions will disburse the loans.

The decision was taken at a high level meeting on 'agricultural loan distribution' held at the conference room of the Ministry of Finance with Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria in the chair yesterday.

Finance Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Bangladesh Bank Governor Lutfar Rahman Sarkar, Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) Chairman Tajul Islam Mohammad

Faruque and Managing Directors of the nationalised commercial banks, Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) and RAKUB were present.

Sources close to the meeting said BKB will disburse agricultural credit of Tk 1,250 crore in the fiscal 1998-99 while RAKUB Tk 300 crore, Sonali Bank Tk 636 crore, Agrani Bank Tk 250 crore, Jatiya Bank Tk 300 crore, Rupali Bank Tk 23 crore, BRDB Tk 495 crore and BSBL Tk 18 crore.

Meanwhile, the government has decided to provide fresh loan to the flood affected farmers in the current fiscal, holding off the repayment of their outstanding loan of the fiscal 1997-98 for one year.

The farmers who had taken agricultural loan up to Tk 15,000 in 1997-98 but now are unable to repay due to flood will be eligible for the fresh loan.

Besides, the farmers who had taken agricultural loan during July-August of the cur-

rent fiscal and fell victim to flood will also be eligible to get the fresh loan. The loan facilities will also be applicable for the cooperative farmers.

The meeting also decided, in principle, to expand branches of BKB to enhance agri-credit activities in rural areas of the country and form a task force to enhance the credit flow.

The task force will submit a report within a month and Bangladesh Bank will take necessary steps in this regard.

Addressing the meeting, Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria stressed the role of rural economic activities in national economy and directed the authorities concerned to gear up the monitoring activities to ensure smooth disbursement of the loan.

He also directed the nationalised commercial banks to give priority to the agri-credit disbursement alongside trade and long-term credits.



Students of Shaukat Memorial School. — Star photo

Shaukat Memorial school helping street urchins

By Staff Correspondent

To bring back the street urchins, who were engaged in different crimes, on the right track, the Shaukat Memorial School has extended a helping hand towards them.

The school, which was established in the city's Momen Bagh area after the death of the renowned litterateur Shaukat Osman on June 1 this year, started with 15 students from the age group of 10 years to 14 years.

The Honorary Consul General of Bangladesh in Malaysia and Executive Chairman and Managing Director of SVK Patchee Brothers (M) SDN. BHD, Shaik Alaouddin Ismail, highly appreciated the endeavour of the school committee during his visit to the school recently. He also donated 200 dollars for the school library and expressed his desire to help the school in near future.

Nine wards of RCC affected by floods

RAJSHAHI, Aug 30: Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu today called upon all city-dwellers to come forward to mitigate the suffering of the flood affected people for greater national interest, reports BSS.

He made this call while addressing a press conference at his office chamber here this afternoon.

The mayor said about forty thousand people of nine wards of Rajshahi City Corporation have been affected by current flood. So far eight thousand dwelling houses were damaged by flood, he added.

A coordination committee headed by Rajshahi Civil Surgeon has been formed to provide medicare services to the flood affected people of the city areas, he said.

AL activists indulged in grabbing lands: BNP

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday blamed the ruling party for grabbing vacant places across the country, reports UNB.

"Awami League activists have indulged in grabbing lands wherever they find it vacant including the capital city," Bhuiyan said in a discussion meeting at the Press Club yesterday afternoon.

The meeting was organised by Chhinnamul (rootless) Hawkers Samity on the occasion of its 7th founding anniversary.

Mannan alleged that the ruling party activists are evicting the innocent hawkers, grabbing the open places and giving lease to supporters.

He said Awami League leaders were making high sounding and lofty statements about re-

habilitation of the hawkers and their welfare. But the hawkers except those belonging to Awami League are deprived of running business.

Bhuiyan accused the ruling party of politicising the hawker community.

The BNP leader was critical of the government move of forcible eviction of slum dwellers near the Hotel Sonargaon without considering the devastating flood situation.

He assured the hawkers of their rehabilitation if the 'democratic government' is established under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia.

Mirza Abbas, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Nazrul Islam Khan and Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anis also spoke at the meeting which was presided over by Kamal Siddiqi.

Policies & priorities on new govt Ruling parties in Nepal reach 25-point accord

KATHMANDU, Aug 30: The two ruling parties in Nepal Saturday reached a 25-point agreement on policies and priorities of the new coalition government with focus on law and order in the country, the official BSS news agency said, reports Xinhua.

The agreement said that the present government has been formed to maintain law and order in the country, preserve territorial integrity, strengthen multi-party democratic system, guarantee human rights, hold the forthcoming elections in a free and fair manner and strengthen the country's economy.

The agreement was signed by Gijrja Prasad Koirala, the prime minister and president of the Nepali Congress (NC) and Sahana Pradhan, president of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxism-Leninism, CPN-M).

Koirala reshuffled his Cabinet Wednesday to induct the CPN-ML, turning the NC minority government into a coalition.

The agreement was signed a day before Koirala is scheduled to fly to Durban, South Africa for the 12th summit of the Non-aligned Movement.

life and property of the people and maintaining law and order. It promised to bring prices of essentials under control and make legal arrangement to have senior political leaders and high-ranking government officials disclose their assets so as to control and eliminate corruption and abuse of authority and other serious social anomalies and crimes.

The agreement stated that the policy of promoting liberal, competitive and just economic structure will be continued and the government will concentrate its efforts on implementing programmes against poverty and unemployment and expediting the process of industrialisation.

The government will be activated to help the Election Commission by creating a congenial atmosphere for holding free and fair elections, the agreement stated.

The fresh general elections in the country are due before November 1999. The agreement stated that as per the declared stand of the government that Kalapani in far-western Nepal is Nepalese territory on the basis of historical evidences available with Nepal and that the Indian Army should be evacuated from there.



The slum dwellers who were evicted from the slum near Sonargaon Hotel on Saturday now passing their days under open sky at Uttar Kalshi in Mirpur as, what they said, they were prevented from erecting their homes. — Star photo

Dhaka-Daudkandi river route Hoodlums, dacoits attack engine boats frequently

By Rafiq Hasan, back from Meghna Ghat

Engine boats carrying passengers have been under frequent attacks by local hoodlums and dacoits at different points in Dhaka-Daudkandi river route.

According to boat owners and local people of Shiddhirganj thana, the incidents of dacoity in the route are on the rise.

Dacoits attacked passenger boats at Bolair Char, Kalagachia, and Hossendi during the last few days, the boat owners said.

"We have stopped operating passenger boats in Dhaka-Daudkandi route fearing dacoity by the local mastans," said Delwar Hossain, an owner of an engine boat.

Dacoits attacked an engine boat at Hossendi under Gazaria thana in Munshiganj district on Friday noon and snatched all the valuables from its passengers.

They also blasted crackers and chopped some of the passengers during the attack, according to a witness who was on another boat during the dacoity.

As the road communications between Dhaka and Daudkandi have remained snapped for about two weeks,

scores of engine boats known as trawler and a few launches have become main vehicles for the people.

Meanwhile, some boat owners alleged that the chairman of Shiddhirganj Union Parishad took Tk 500 per trip from each passenger boat as Ghat charge.

"We are helpless that the chairman took almost half the money we earn from a trip," said a boat owner requesting anonymity.

While contacted, Noor Hossain, the UP chairman, denied taking such amount of money from the boat owners. He said that Tk 50 to 70 had been taken for maintaining discipline and serial of the boats at the Ghat near Kanchpur Bridge.

He said the system was established following a quarrel among the boat owners relating to serial. The money collected from them is being spent as allowance for about 40 people who are engaged in maintaining serial and helping passengers get on to the boats.

After providing the allowance, the surplus money will be distributed among the flood victims as relief," the chairman added.

PM shocked

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed deep shock at the death of five policemen in a boat capsizing in Sylhet while performing their duties, reports UNB.

In a message yesterday, she said the policemen have set a glorious example of dedication ignoring the affection for life.

Hasina prayed for salvation of the departed souls and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family members.

In another message, Hasina condoled the death of Fullata thana unit Awami League General Secretary Ibad Ali Akhundi, Jubo League leader Shahadat Hossain and Chhatra League leader Imdadul Haq Babul in Khulna.

They were killed in a tragic road accident on Saturday night.

She also prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls.

DPRK delegation in city

A four-member military goodwill delegation from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) led by Major General Kim Song Chol arrived in the city yesterday on a six-day visit, reports UNB.

During their stay in Bangladesh, the members of the delegation will call on Chief of Army Staff Lt General Muhammad Mustafizur Rahman and other senior army officers, said a press release.



Flooded Tallabagh area of the city. — Star photo

Pakistan accuses India of 'unwarranted interference'

ISLAMABAD, Aug 30: Pakistan on Sunday accused India of 'unwarranted interference' in its internal affairs after India's prime minister criticised Islamabad's plans to introduce a new legal system based on the Muslim holy book, the Quran, reports AP.

"It is unacceptable and unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan," said Information Minister Mushahid Hussain.

Hussain was referring to statements by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee that a proposed constitutional amendment to create a new Islamic order in Pakistan was a step backward.

The Press Trust of India quoted Vajpayee as saying that "when we are preparing to enter the 21st century such a step in Pakistan takes us backward. This cannot be welcome."

On Friday Pakistan introduced a constitutional amendment that would scrap the old British common laws and replace them with Islamic laws based on the Quran and the Sunnah, which are the writings of Islam's Prophet Mohammed (SM).

According to the Press Trust of India, Vajpayee said that a new Islamic order in Pakistan "will have a definite impact on Afghanistan and in the Central Asian republics."

After last May's tit-for-tat nuclear explosions, Hussain said it was incumbent on both India and Pakistan to choose their words carefully when criticising each other.

"We need to act in a mature and responsible manner... more so in light of the momentous (events) in the month of May," said Hussain referring to the underground nuclear explosions carried out by both India and Pakistan. "We should be very careful about what we say

Iran plans to hold military exercises near Afghan border

TEHRAN, Aug 30: Some 70,000 elite Iranian soldiers plan to hold exercises near the border with Afghanistan, where Tehran says the Taliban militia is holding 47 Iranians, reports AP.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps will hold the manoeuvres, code named Ashura 3, within the next few days, Maj Gen Yahya Rahim Safavi, the commander of the IRGC, said Saturday.

He said preliminary exercises have already started and they will be followed by the main manoeuvres, which will last for three days.

The manoeuvres will be the largest this year and the first held near the border since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he said.

Iran has accused the Taliban militia, which controls most of the country, of detaining 47 Iranians since it captured the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif on August 8. The detainees include 11 diplomats, one journalist and 35 truck drivers.

The Taliban says it knows nothing about the Iranian diplomats, but it admits to holding some 30 Iranians suspected to be arms smugglers.

"It is natural that our manoeuvres are not unrelated to the recent Afghan affairs," Safavi said in a press conference attended for the first time by foreign as well as local reporters.

Last week, IRGC troops were deployed on the border with Afghanistan to monitor the movement of forces fighting the civil war there.

Also last week, former President Hashemi Rafsanjani warned that Iran might resort to force to free the Iranians.

More countries pledge aid for flood victims

More countries and institutions continue to respond to Bangladesh's call for support to face the catastrophe caused by this year's record-breaking floods, reports BSS.

Pledges of assistance came from India, the Netherlands and Asian Development Bank, foreign office sources said yesterday.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in a message to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, assured to help Bangladesh carry relief work and take up post-flood rehabilitation activities.

"India stands ready to associate itself with relief work in Bangladesh now and in the post-flood rehabilitation period," the message said.

Vajpayee said the High Commission of India in Bangladesh will remain in close touch with Bangladesh government in this connection. He said the people of India share the grief and sorrow of the people of Bangladesh due to floods which affected large parts of the country causing substantial loss of life and property.

A message from Manila said the Asian Development Bank (ADB) would, on priority basis, assess the needs of Bangladesh through its mission in Dhaka. The bank would try to render promptly all possible assistance.

Meanwhile, officials of Bangladesh mission in Manila have donated one day's salary to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

A message from The Hague said the Dutch government announced emergency relief for Bangladesh flood victims amounting to five lakh Dutch guilders. Half of the amount

will be provided through International Red Cross. One lakh guilders will be provided through NGOs, while the channelling of the remaining 1,50,000 guilders is yet to be decided, the message said.

Japan has donated emergency health kit along with water purifying tablets and plastic sheets worth Taka one crore for the flood victims, an official handout said in the city yesterday.

The Japanese ambassador in Dhaka, Yoshikazu Kaneko yesterday handed over the documents of the donation to the Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief Azad Ruhul Amin at the Secretariat, the handout said.

Riyadh Daily, an influential Saudi newspaper, appealed for help to the flood-affected people of Bangladesh. The Daily, in an editorial on Thursday, said "In this hour of need, friends and foes alike have a responsibility in lending a helping hand to alleviate the sufferings of the Bangladeshi people."

Shibir obstructs CU shuttle train

CHITTAGONG, Aug 30: Activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir today obstructed plying of university shuttle trains at Sholashahar junction by holding rallies on the rail tracks during their siege programme enforced at the Chittagong University reports BSS.

According to a university press release, Shibir activists began demonstration on the rail line at 7 am this morning. The protesting students to get down from the train and return to their houses.

PM: Sink differences

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stock and expected foreign assistance, she said seven lakh tons of foodgrains are stocked in godowns. The government took steps for importing six lakh metric tons of rice and wheat on commercial basis.

In the private sector, 3.45 lakh metric tons of rice arrived in July and August. An additional 8.9 lakh tons of foodgrains are likely to be imported by the same sector.

The Prime Minister said, friendly countries and international agencies have so far committed about 6.65 lakh metric tons of food aid.

She said an emergency food assistance of about 13.5 lakh metric tons have been sought from the friendly countries and foreign agencies to strengthen the food security system.

"We've got encouraging response to our appeal, the Prime Minister assured the nation. She said the United States promised two lakh metric tons and the European Union 81,000 metric tons of wheat.

Australia also decided to send 86,000 tons of wheat and one lakh Australian dollar on emergency basis.

Hasina said many other countries and agencies, including Japan and Kuwait, the UN secretary general and World Bank, extended their helping hands.

The Prime Minister said the government had adequate preparation to face any situation caused by normal flood.

"But now we need huge resources for rehabilitation after the flood that turned severe due to excessive rains and its long duration."

She said crops have been damaged and bridge-culverts, communications network, socio-economic infrastructure including health and education sectors suffered a heavy loss.

Referring to her government's relief efforts, Hasina said she convened an emergency meeting of inter-ministerial Disaster Management on July 16 and had directed to shift the flood affected people to the safe shelter and launch relief operation.

The government has so far distributed relief goods worth about Tk 100 crore and ensured supply of rice, salt, kerosene and other essentials in the affected areas.

She said 3,473 medical teams are working to treat the people sickened by flood water and also cancelled weekly holidays of the government doctors in the affected areas, including Dhaka city.

The Prime Minister said she had asked all tiers of the administration to remain alert to face any eventuality caused by flood. The members of army, navy and air force also stood beside the victims and are assisting the civil administration to combat the situation.

She said the government is planning to begin the rehabilitation programme as soon as the flood water recedes. Cash money allocated for the affected farmers.

She asked the agriculture workers to protect seedbeds and take steps for new ones so that those could be distributed after the flood.

Hasina said the government has already directed to stop realising the agri-loans and its interests this year and disburse fresh agriculture loans.

The Prime Minister said steps have been taken to distribute foodgrains through 300 to 1,000 VGP cards in each affected union.

Besides, she said, directives were given to rehabilitate floating and rootless people in ideal villages and Ashrayan project on a government Khair land.

The people will also be given financial assistance so that they can be self-reliant.

Hasina said the flood this year continued for a longer pe-

riod due to a number of factors like solar eclipse and tremor in the sea.

She said water level also swelled in all the major rivers simultaneously that is rare. As a result, intensity and duration of the flood was more than those in the past.

She mentioned that the nearly two-month-long flood caused more damage to public life as compared with the past. Damage to crops, houses, socio-economic infrastructure was also higher.

The Prime Minister expressed her concern that "no long-term projects were taken by the post-75 governments" to protect the people from natural calamities.

Rather, the plans and projects undertaken by Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after the independence were shelved by the successive regimes, she said.

"Due to absence of dredging, the rivers lost their navigability. No long term plan or any master plan taken to solve this problem in last 21 years."

Hasina said her government is formulating project of different terms to evolve the means for utilising the huge flood water.

About the proposed Ganges Barrage Project, she said the present government has undertaken an initiative in this respect. Besides, steps were taken to increase navigability of rivers.

The Prime Minister prayed for peace and salvation of those who lost their lives in the flood and expressed her deep sympathy to the others who lost houses and crops or were attacked with different diseases in the flood stricken areas.

Halda

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operation in Sonadia also remains suspended for the last few months as the drilling crew faced unexpected pressure at a certain depth. Cairn then decided to bring in a heavier rig for the operation replacing the lighter one deployed there.

Cairn has purchased a rig itself and is planning to lease it out to a third party operator, which would finish the drilling work. But due to some technical problems, the rig has not yet been imported to Bangladesh from the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Cairn's top executive Richard Heaton in the country has been recalled by the company's head office in Edinburgh. Sources said, Heaton would leave Bangladesh in December.

"It seems that the head office is not satisfied with Heaton's performance in the recent months — specially in the Second Round Block Bidding," said a source. "Heaton will also have to shoulder the responsibilities of the cost over-runs at Halda and Sangu."

Khaleda : Bail

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the Anti-corruption Act against Begum Zia and her former private secretary Sabluddin Ahmed.

BNP leaders and lawyers Khondokar Mahbubuddin Ahmed, Moudud Ahmed, Habibul Islam Bhuiyan and Nazmul Huda were among those who moved the bail petition. They argued that the case was filed with a mala fide intention to harass and tarnish her image.

The prosecution lawyers led by Public Prosecutor Altaf Hossain argued that nobody was above the law and that the case was lodged as per legal obligations and that it is justified.

During the hearing, Begum Zia sat in a chair with the permission of the court.