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Deaths from water-borne diseases increasing

By Naimul Haq

The rate of fatality from diarrhoea and dysentery in the country has increased alarmingly, sources in the health ministry said.

Typoidal pneumonia and jaundice are also spreading fast. The situation was reviewed at an emergency meeting at the health ministry recently.

State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Prof M Amanullah told The Daily Star "Diarrhoeal situation is worse this year compared to previous year's. The government has taken all possible measures to face the situation."

One hundred and sixteen out of 1,52,652 patients died of the disease since July 15, officials said.

According to sources in the health directorate, 5,195 people were attacked with the disease in the last 24 hours.

Unofficial estimates, however, put the death toll from the disease at over 200 and the case of attack at more than 2,00,000 since the beginning of floods.

Through the government claims adequate measures have been taken to handle any crisis, those involved in treating diarrhoea say that incidence of the disease is rising at an alarming rate and may go beyond control.

"There are many deaths as well as attacks which are not reported. Many victims are actually not able to see a doctor," said a physician, requesting anonymity.

He said, "Diarrhoea cases along with those of other diseases would rise at an alarming rate as flood water starts to recede. Once water starts to recede, concentration of the bacteria in water would be higher.

so naturally, incidence of the disease would increase."

The health directorate has set up 80 emergency temporary medical camps and deployed 4,088 medical teams consisting of 1,958 doctors. "We are attending patients round the clock," one doctor told this correspondent.

But, Md Malek of Kandapara of Fatullah said, "My 10-month old son has been suffering from diarrhoea for two days now. I have been giving him oral saline but there is no improvement. I was expecting help from medical teams but they are yet to be visible in the area."

Director of Primary Healthcare Dr Zakir Hossain, while talking to this correspondent, said, "Special arrangements to address the problem were made recently. We have taken emergency measures to send mobile medical teams to 116 city flood shelters for the convenience of the affected people."

Dr Hossain said that 16 urban dispensaries were turned into oral rehydration therapy (ORT) centres, in addition to the health centres set up in two schools.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation and the World Bank, on an emergency basis, have provided two lakh water purifying tablets for distribution among the flood victims.

Health directorate officials said that 15 lakh intravenous fluid bags were in the pipeline for distribution at the treatment centres. "We have a stock of 2.5 crore packets of oral saline and other medicines," one official said.

Seminar on oil, gas

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Brig (ret) M Abdul Hafiz, former vice chancellors Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, Prof Dr M Shahjahan, and Prof M Shamsheer All spoke at the discussion.

Political scientists and educationists Prof Dr Muhtasham Hossain, Prof Dr Talukder Moinuzzaman, Prof Dr Ziaul Shams Haq, Prof Badrul Imam, Dr MA Rob, economist Prof Abu Ahmed, Dr Salahuddin Ahmed, technical experts Dr Abul Matin, Gasuddin Ahmed, M Badruddoza, Secretary of Foreign Chamber of Commerce and Industry Jahangir Bin Alam and lawyers Barrister Mainul Hossain and Dr M Zahir also spoke at the roundtable.

They observed that it was high time for the nation to put issues like oil and gas above any narrow political opinion. The speakers also said that the current policy did not allow presence of a 'local agents' for foreign oil companies but the present bidding was being influenced by a number of local agents.

Dr Kamal Hossain was critical about the second round bidding. He said, "Opening up of all the blocks in one go is unheard of. There is no such practice anywhere in the world."

He also blasted the government for its 'repeated attempts' to find big partners for certain small companies in blocks 8, 9 and 11. "This, again, is unheard of. Why should the government find a company a partner?"

Dr Kamal Hossain said, "We don't oppose foreign investment in the energy sector. We want foreign investment and technology. But at what terms? We must ensure the best for the least. Foreign companies come here to make profit. They will try to negotiate terms that are best for them. We have to ensure the best for us. Therefore we can not go for oil and gas negotiations blindly."

"We must first determine our local energy needs on short, medium and long term basis. We must also think about renewable alternative energy resources. Instead of thinking about gas export, we must consider import of cheap and clean hydro-electricity from Nepal and Bhutan," he said.

Bangladesh must develop its capability to handle the energy sector. Both Petrobrangla and Malaysian exploration company Petronas were built in 1974. Now, just because of proper national vision, Petronas has become so big that it is operating in 14 countries and has proposed for some blocks in Bangladesh.

"We must learn to appreciate our own skills and ability. Despite negligence of the authorities, Petrobrangla has expanded and achieved remarkable achievements at very low cost. But now, its experts are leaving Petrobrangla. I have not heard anyone in Petrobrangla trying to stop such exodus. This should stop," Dr Kamal said.

Other speakers, discussion on BAPEX, said that a quarter was trying to destroy it saying that it was a liability for the government. They suggested that besides regular government finances, BAPEX could raise funds by floating public shares.

"BAPEX has been deliberately delinked from commercial operation. How can anybody say that it's a liability," said Dr Khandker Mosharraf Hossain. "Petrobrangla itself can finance BAPEX's schemes from its own earning."

M Badruddoza said, to make BAPEX self-sufficient and vibrant, the government must allow it to oversee gas production from the wells it discovered.

Dr M Shahjahan said that BAPEX could be turned into a private organisation for more efficient operations.

PM's directive

cerned to take special care of them.

When the flood will start receding, various water-borne diseases will attack the flood victims, she said and asked all to take every precautionary measures to combat the situation.

Hasina further directed to open more medical centres and supply adequate medicine and saline in all flood centres and flood-affected areas.

About the distribution of relief, the Prime Minister said the ministers have been given the responsibility of specific districts to supervise relief operations.

3 DU students stabbed near campus

By Staff Correspondent

Three students of Dhaka University were stabbed by unidentified persons at Nilkhet last night.

They were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. All the three are residents of Mohsin Hall, hospital sources said.

When contacted Dhanmondi police said late last night they had heard about a problem between some students of the university and traders of Nilkhet Bakusah Market.

But they received no complaint in this regard.

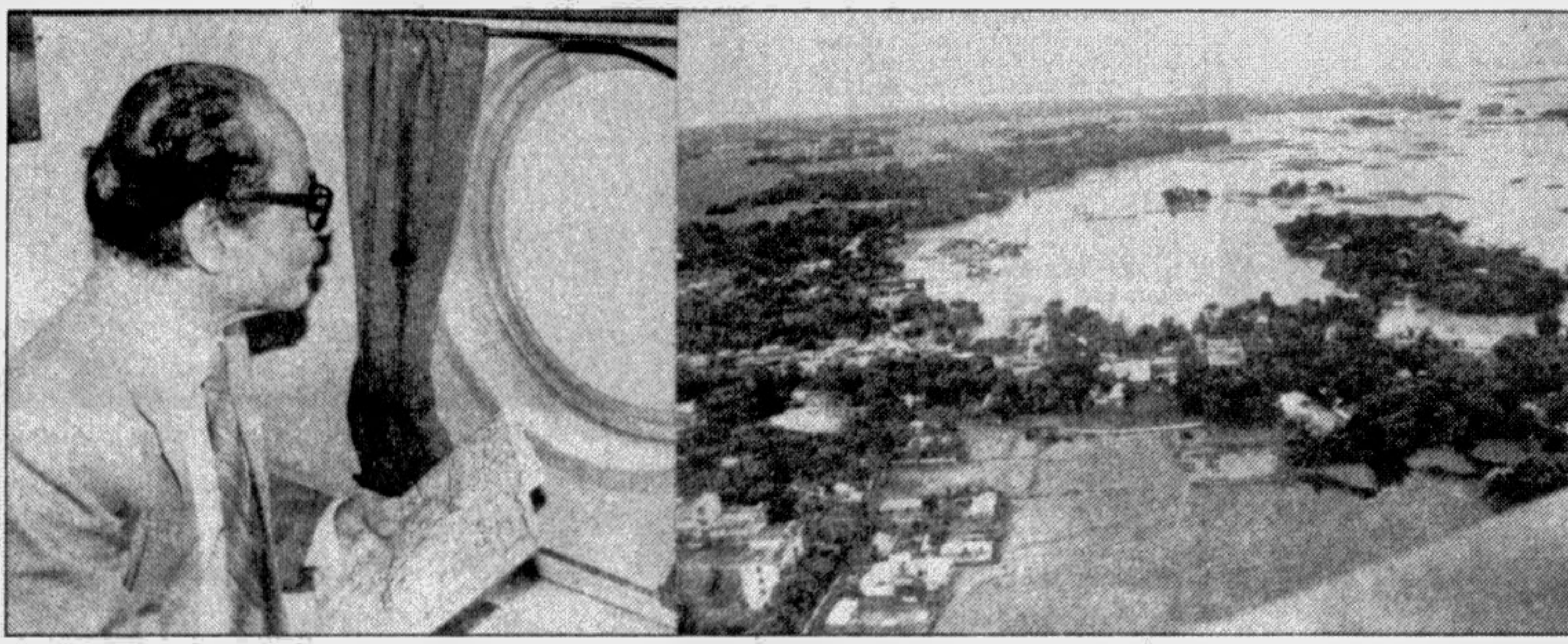
Suspension of DU classes extended till Sept 15

By DU Correspondent

The Dhaka University authorities have decided to extend suspension of classes till September 15 as the overall flood situation remained unchanged and some of the university students are engaged in the relief activities, said a DU press release.

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President Shahabuddin Ahmed having an aerial view of some flood affected areas of the country yesterday. — PID photo

President

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the embankment threatened by flood waters. The President said that the embankment must be protected by putting boulders on its western side and necessary steps should be taken after the flood for avoiding recurrence of such danger in future.

Parliament members Khondkar Asaduzzaman, MA Mannan, Latif Siddiqui, Kader Siddiqui and GOC Mymensingh Major General Masudur Rahman were present on the occasion.

On his arrival at Rajshahi, the President visited the Rajshahi town protection embankment. The 17 mile-long embankment is protected by five groynes, out of which, one is threatened by flood waters.

The President was told that the civil administration, in collaboration with the army and the BDR, has been in constant alert to protect the groyne.

GOC of Bogra Major-General Mammad Anwar Hossain, Rajshahi Divisional Commissioner and Chief Engineer of Rajshahi Water Development Board briefed the President on the spot and said that the onrush of flood waters is on the increase and it is flowing above the danger level.

State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Talukder Abdul Khaleque accompanied the President.

Natore AL, BNP suspend their political activities for 15 days

NATORE, Sept 5: All political activities of Awami League and BNP were suspended for next 15 days following a reconciliation meeting today to stop violence in the district, reports UNB.

The meeting was held with DC M Ishaq Bhuiyan in the chair. The decision came after violent activities for last four days.

About 20 top leaders of both parties were present in the meeting and agreed to suspend their respective political programmes for the period.

The two sides also decided not to interfere into any actions by the district administration. Police will take necessary steps to restore law and order.

Meanwhile, a dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed in the town today protesting terrorism.

Floods

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In its forecast for the next 48 hours yesterday, the FFWC said the two major rivers would continue to rise, triggering a swell in the Meghna too.

There have been reports of fresh floods in Assam. Similar reports came from Uttar Pradesh of India.

In fact, the flood waters in north-western and north-eastern India roll down the Ganges and the Brahmaputra.

The Brahmaputra accounts for 55 to 60 per cent of the total water volume carried by the major rivers. Its rise at this time of the year when the Ganges is at its peak flow is certainly unusual, Dr Jahiruddin Chowdhury, a professor at the Institute of Flood and Water Resources of Engineering University, said.

He said the full moon last night also had its impact on the situation. Huge volumes of water from the two rivers going down the Meghna are being impeded by the rising tide caused by the lunar cycle, Chowdhury added.

The FFWC recorded a peak of 5.17 metres during high tide yesterday, three centimetres above the previous day's mark. The ebb tide declined by two centimetres from Friday, recording at 4.37 metres.

According to Chowdhury, the rise and fall in the tidal flow are natural before, during and after the full moon because the range between the two flows increases.

He said after the full moon there would be natural decrease in the tidal flow.

But the situation would remain static, if the Brahmaputra continues to rise, he added.

JCD, Shibir enforce indefinite strike at IU

ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY (Kushtia), Sept 5: All classes and scheduled examinations of the Islamic University were postponed today following indefinite strike called by two student bodies, reports UNB.

But the administrative activities went as usual and the University Central Library was open.

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Islami Chhatra Shibir enforced the indefinite strike from today protesting what they said corruption and nepotism of the Vice-Chancellor and demanding cancellation of illegal appointment of teachers.

They also demanded appointment of more eligible teachers and introduction of the proposed Department of Fikah and Comparative Religion in the university.

The first day of the strike passed peacefully. Transporters carrying officials, teachers and students reached the campus under police escort. But the presence of students and teachers was very thin.

Student bodies who are in favour of the strike brought out silent processions on the campus, protesting the ban on student politics in the university.

Over 400 police personnel

have been deployed on the campus to avert any untoward situation.

Following the unrest, the IU authorities postponed today's scheduled examinations of Accounting, Management, Law and Economics departments.

The examination of Management department, scheduled tomorrow, has also been postponed.

Witnesses said some agitating students, reportedly abuse at Assistant Proctor M Mizanur Rahman when he prevented them from forcibly entering the VC's office at 11:15 in the morning.

Earlier, on Friday night, a meeting between Vice-Chancellor Prof M Qaisuddin and the IU Teachers' Association (IUTA) also could not come up with any solution.

The IUTA leaders submitted a memorandum to the VC containing some demands to make the situation normal. The VC informed them that he was acting as per the university rule.

Meanwhile, the IU Teachers Association called a general meeting on Tuesday to discuss the situation on the campus.

Body to probe police-mob clash in city

By Staff Correspondent

A three-member inquiry committee was formed yesterday to investigate the incident of clash between police and a mob at the South Plaza of the Sangsad Bhaban Friday evening.

A young woman, Ishrat Jahan, was allegedly assaulted by police, prompting the clash. Besides, at least 50 people were injured and 40 motor vehicles were damaged in the incident.

The inquiry committee headed by Assistant Inspector General (Crime) MA Hanif includes two Assistant Deputy Commissioners.

Meanwhile, police filed two cases with Tejgaon thana late Friday night, accusing 19 people of trespassing, damaging state property and attacking police. Sixteen of them were arrested.

Police said three of the 19 accused, including Ishrat, have been absconding since the incident.

The arrested accused were produced before the CMM's court yesterday. The court sent them to Dhaka Central Jail.

Extra police force has been deployed in the area since Friday night.

Spl ADB fund

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"The situation is very severe and we will do what is possible on our part," he told a questioner.

The ADB delegation leader indicated that the Bank may provide fund to repair the communication network, particularly in the rural areas.

The eight-member delegation met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, cabinet members, chamber leaders and NGOs, and also visited several ADB-aided projects.

They visited Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong Port, Bangladesh Bridge and the Flood Protection Project in Sirajganj.

About the financial assistance to the CHT, Pittore said the Bank may formulate a 15-20 years plan for the development of the region.

"It (CHT) needs development of road, education, health and other sectors," he said.

Another member of the team, Hans-Jürgen Styrk, said a mission will visit the CHT towards the end of this year or early next year to make a study for the development of CHT.

Pittore also said the ADB is working for upgradation of Chittagong Port.

He expressed satisfaction over the performance of the Bank-aided projects.

But still there is some room for improvement of the implementation rate by removing certain bottlenecks like the problem of land acquisition, the ADB team leader said.

Train

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During the strike, four trains were stranded at Chittagong station and three at Pahartali station.

The kidnapped driver was released at about 2:30 pm at the Pahartali station. Dfwar was admitted to the hospital.

Power plant

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dia, Singh said. The latest offer by NTPC is an "improvement" over the earlier one in which transportation of gas in Bangladesh was mooted, drawing opposition from Bangladesh government, the NTPC chairman said.

"The new proposal," Singh said, "keeps in mind the interests of both Indian and Bangladesh and should be acceptable to Dhaka as it would meet the growing demand for infrastructure in Bangladesh."

Multinational companies like AES Transpower, Enron and Shell have been shortlisted for the gasfields and are likely to be one of the equity partners if the proposal is found acceptable, Singh said.

Two committees have been set up in Bangladesh and India involving Power Grid Corporation to look into possibilities of transmission of power from the proposed plant.

AL doing nasty politics with people's plight: Khaleda

GAZIPUR, Sept 5: BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia today accused the government of misleading the distressed people by blowing up its relief operation in state-run television, reports UNB.

"Awami League is doing nasty politics with the miseries of the people," said the opposition leader refuting allegation by government leaders against her. "BNP has never campaigned for political gains out of miseries of the people."

"For mere publicity, the ruling party is making roti on roadside," Begum Zia said. She advised the Prime Minister to refrain from vituperative campaign involving her name.

The opposition leader accused the Prime Minister of all-out cooperation to face the crisis "if the government truly goes for giving relief to the needy."

BNP chairperson was speaking briefly while distributing relief materials among the flood affected people at Teestagate, Milla Bazar, Majda High School and Gachha High School flood shelters in Tongi and Gazipur.

She said BNP's demand of forming all party relief committee was intended to check plunder of relief goods and ensure proper distribution among the affected people.

But, she regretted, "they (ruling party leaders) would not form the committee. Their only objective is to deprive and deceive the people. They make commitments but never implement."

"You have done a mistake by casting vote for Awami League in the past. Do not repeat the mistake in future," Begum Zia told the people.

She said it is a tragedy that whenever Awami League came to power, prices of essentials went up and calamity engulfed the nation. Sufferings of the

people will be increase if this party continue to rule the country.

Referring to the increasing price of rice, onion, pulse, edible oil and other essentials, she asked the government to check the upward trend to keep the prices within the buying capacity of the commonman.

Apprehending a grave post-flood situation, the opposition leader called upon the government to take adequate measures to face the situation. She cautioned that thousands of people will be rendered jobless.

JU teachers end boycott of classes

By JU Correspondent

The Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association (JUTA) yesterday decided to end their boycott and resume classes from today following expulsion of two students responsible for assaulting a teacher on the campus on August 23.

The decision was taken at a meeting with JUTA president Jasimuddin Ahmed in the chair. The meeting, however, termed the action inadequate, said a press release.

The JU authorities expelled BCL general secretary at JU Jasimuddin Manik for one year and another leader, Meer Mehedi Hasan Titu, for two years from the university on Wednesday for assaulting the teacher, Rehnuna Ahmed.

The JUTA also demanded immediate punishment of the culprits involved in the recent rape of three students on the campus and announced a two-hour token strike from 10 am on September 13 if the demand is not met by that time.

Support to Rabi crop

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prices are kept static through vigorous government intervention, people will not have cash to buy it. This can lead to a demand depression and inflation."

Dr Quazi Shahabuddin, research director of BIDS, said that the timing of food import is a very crucial factor in coping with the flood situation.

"If import is delayed, prices will increase," said Dr Shahabuddin. "This will put marginal farmers and landless people at distress. On the other hand, late arrival of food can result in a glut and there can be sharp decline in rice prices. This will affect the farmers harshly. This has happened in the past in Bangladesh."

It is now estimated that at least two million tons of Aman rice and 0.3 million ton of Aus rice have been wiped out by the flood. This will necessitate at least four million tonnes of rice import this year.

The current food stock will last till October without much strain on the price, but by November, the government will have to ensure food import and distribution, noted Dr Shahabuddin. The government will have to intervene in the market in a bigger way by November.

On the other hand, the timing of the safety net programme of the government for the marginal and landless farmers also to be advanced. It should be started from October as soon as the water recedes, said Dr Shahabuddin.

The government should ensure private import by giving incentives to the private sector and by removing any tensions with India. On the other hand, the government should expedite its own import and food aid from donors, Shahabuddin added.

"The flood will have a multiplying effect on the small and medium-scale industries," he said. "Small industries in and around Dhaka have suffered severely which will also affect backward and forward linkage industries related to these. The industrial sector will suffer more than the 1988 flood because of the duration of flood."

Dr Murshid said unlike the 1988 flood, this year's flood will have an adverse impact on agriculture. "After the 1988 flood, food production increased in Bangladesh. But it will not be the same this time because time for the Aman cultivation has already passed. As a result, it will be impossible to meet the growth target for agriculture. Rice alone accounts for 70 per cent of the agricultural growth."

"There would be demand oriented effects on the economy," added Dr Murshid. "The flood affected people will go for asset liquidation. Already, they are selling off their livestock and poultry at cheaper prices to sustain the long flood. But it is expected that after the water recedes, people would also go for selling their land which will reduce prices of land as well."

UZ Parishad

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Parishad. On the basis of the commission's report, Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act, 1997, was passed by the Jatiya Sangsad last year and election to some 4,000 union parishads in the country were held in a staggered manner throughout the month of December last year.

Of the four tiers of local government structure, the government is now giving more importance to Upazila Parishad and wants it to enjoy greater freedom in serving the constituents.

Upazila parishads would be empowered to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets, maintain funds and recruit officials and employees for various departments at local level, said sources.

Composition of upazila parishads will also vary as the number of union parishads under all upazilas is not the same.

Chairmen of all union parishads under a particular upazila will be ex-officio members of that upazila parishad. However, chairmen of the upazila parishads will be directly elected on the basis of adult franchise.

There will be arrangements for indirect elections to elect female members in each upazila parishad. Female members of all union parishads under a particular upazila will be eligible to cast votes for electing three female members of that upazila parishad.

Besides, heads of different government departments at the thana level will be 'non-voting' members and the TNO (Thana Nirbahi Officer) will be member-secretary of upazila parishad.

Huge arms

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placed under suspension and closed in the police lines. The Court Sub-Inspector (CSI) Majelul Islam and one constable Jalaluddin have been suspended, and taken into custody suspecting their "direct involvement" in the theft, the KMP Commissioner said.

The police commissioner further said that breaking of ventilator and locks of the store room is a "set-up" case. "Rather, the firearms were removed from the store room at different times in connivance with the CSI and the constable already taken into custody," he said.