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JS body detects irregularities in tea, insurance sectors

Separate sub-committees of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce found many an irregularity in the country's tea and insurance sectors, official sources said, reports UNB.

However, both the bodies need another three months' time to finalise their reports with suggestions for bringing back discipline in the areas.

The sub-committees were allowed the extended time at a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday with its chairman Raziuddin Ahmed Raju presiding.

Sources said the meeting was informed that the sub-committee on insurance already had detected many irregularities and corruption in the sector.

Massive corruption is taking place in case of reinsurance while there are huge irregularities

in insurance claims and in process of giving permission to new companies, the parliamentarians were learnt to have been told.

Irregularities were also found even in the big companies. In case of claim settlement, the big companies take recourse to dilly-dallying procedure, sources added.

The meeting extended the time for submission of the final report by another three months as the sub-committee couldn't complete the task as its convener, Mir Sarafat Ali Daru, MP, had stayed abroad for long.

It also granted same period of time to the sub-committee on tea after it also failed to prepare the report again due to problems with its convener, Mahibur Rahman Manik, MP.

Manik is facing some legal problems due to bomb explosions at his home that killed two people.

However, the meeting was informed that the sub-committee already had found many irregularities in tea industry, specially relating to land leased for tea gardens but used as housing plots.

The sub-committee members informed that they also detected the problems prevailing in the sector and were preparing to find out solutions to boost tea exports.

Apart from time extension for the sub-committee, the Standing Committee also took stock of tea production, export process, cause of price fall in international market and land leasing for tea gardens.

Among the members present were Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed, M. Mahibur Rahman Manik, Master Majibur Rahman, Biren Sikder, Akhter Hamid Siddiqui, Sarwar Jamal Nizam and Prof Shahidul Islam.

US to provide funds for feasibility study on arsenic water treatment

The United States will provide US dollar 267,500 to Bangladesh for a feasibility study on arsenic water treatment as per an agreement signed here yesterday, reports BSS.

Charge d'Affairs of the US Embassy in Bangladesh Ted Nist and Secretary of the Economic Relations Division (ERD) Dr Mashur Rahman signed the agreement on behalf of the two sides, a USIS press release said.

The contractor, Tetrahedron Inc, will conduct the study project to be funded by the US Trade and Development Agency for the arsenic water treatment.

The study will be conducted to develop a cost-effective system for treating arsenic-contaminated water, making it both technically and socially acceptable for the people of Bangladesh.

Decision of Registrar of Trade Union on BRSI stayed

By SC Correspondent

A High Court division bench on Sunday ordered stay of the decision of the Registrar of Trade Unions declaring Mohammad Serajullah and Habibur Rahman Akandh as president and general secretary of the Bangladesh Railway Sramik League (BRSI) respectively for three months.

A division bench of the HC comprising Justice KM Hasan and Justice MA Qudus by the order dated July 18 also directed the registrar and deputy registrar of trade unions, Mohammad Serajullah and Habibur Rahman Akandh to explain why the decision should not be declared without lawful authority and is of no legal effect.

The order was passed upon a writ petition filed by Alhaj Rahmatullah Chowdhury claiming himself as the duly elected president of the organisation.

The petitioner submitted that the committee of BRSI was formed at its conference on November 26 and 27 of 1997 with Rahmatullah Chowdhury and Habibur Rahman Akandh as its president and general secretary respectively. The petitioner said that the new committee was communicated to the Registrar of Trade Unions by joint signature of its president and general secretary on November 29, 1997. But on December 21 1997 the deputy registrar informed the DG railway that his office received two committees of the organisation and told them to explain the matter on January 8 1998.

On January 8 1998 they did. Later on April 15 1999 the registrar of trade unions by a letter to the DG Railway informed that the committee led by Serajullah and Habibur Rahman Akandh as president and general secretary of the organisation was functioning. The writ was moved by Dr Kamal Hossain.

Gheor thana OC closed

MANIKGANJ, July 20: The officer-in-charge of Gheor thana has been closed as his activities came under severe criticism in the press, reports UNB. A section of the press had reported that Belayet Hussain harassed residents of Gheor, implicated innocent people in false cases and took bribes by abusing his official powers. A group of people of Fulhara village recently observed hunger strike to protest his misdeeds, including rape.

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Case against Chetia Two witnesses cross-examined

By Court Correspondent

Two witnesses of a case, filed against ULFA leader Anup Chetia and two others on charge of possessing an illegal satellite telephone set, were cross-examined yesterday at the First Assistant Metropolitan Sessions' Judge Court.

The ULFA leader along with two accomplices — Babul Surma and Laxmi Prasad Goswami — were arrested on December 21, 1997 with an unauthorised satellite telephone set and some foreign currency at city's Mohammapur.

The three accused were produced before the court at about 11 am. Abdul Hasib Mia, one of the lawyers for the accused, cross-examined witnesses, Inspector Mubijul Haq and constable Khorsheed Alam, for about an hour.

The Judge, AKM Arifur Rahman, fixed August 30 for cross-examination of the rest of the witnesses in the case.

3 pvt jute mills workers observe hartal in Khulna industrial area

KHULNA, July 20: A dawn-to-dusk hartal, called jointly by the workers and employees of three private owned jute mills in Khulna industrial area was observed here peacefully, reports BSS.

During the hartal shops, business establishments and educational institutions were closed while vehicles were off the road.

The workers and employees of the private-owned Sonali, Afl and Ajax Jute mills called hartal demanding payment of their arrears and withdrawal of cases filed against the leaders.

All BJMC run jute mills and other industrial establishments in both Khulshpur and Daulatpur areas including newsprint mills, hardboard mills and cable factory functioned normally.

Floods hit 57 dists in Assam

KATHMANDU, July 20: Heavy downpours followed by mudslides and floods have left 85 people dead and affected 57 districts over the last two weeks, Nepal Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka said today, reports AFP.

Briefing parliament on the situation he said mudslides and floods caused by heavy rainfall had washed away several houses as well as bridges.

An official of the Meteorological Department said the monsoon rains, which started about six weeks ago, would last until the end of August, warning heavy rain before then could lead to "heavy losses of life and property."

This year the rains have hit all 75 districts in the kingdom which had helped the cultivation of paddy.

Narsingdi liquor tragedy: 19 likely to be chargesheeted

NARSINGDI, July 20: After two-and-a-half months of inquiry, the charge sheet in liquor tragedy case was submitted to the Public Prosecutor here on Monday, reports UNB.

The charge sheet is expected to be placed before the court by two weeks after completion of some necessary formalities. Nineteen people, accused in the case, are likely to be chargesheeted. Of them, 11 are absconding.

BNP blasts decision to enhance power tariff

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has blasted government decision for enhancing electricity tariff and demanded its immediate cancellation.

In a statement yesterday, he said the government has enhanced the electricity price five times in last three years and said the latest decision will paralyse normal life of common people, destroy industries and the irrigation system.

Bhuiyan said the price hike came at a time when the economy is on the verge of destruction, when income of common people is at the lowest level, when mills, factories and industries are being closed one after another and when prices of essentials are rising gradually.

Though the government failed to ensure supply of necessary electricity, it didn't hesitate to increase the price of electricity," he added.



Suharto admitted to hospital

JAKARTA, July 20: Former Indonesian president Suharto was admitted to Jakarta's Pertamina hospital today, reports AFP.

"He came here for a check-up, without any (health) complaints," hospital spokesman Sjahrir Muhammad said.

Suharto was believed to have been admitted to the VIP ward on the sixth floor. It was tightly guarded with access restricted to authorised staff members and immediate relatives.

A cameraman, one of scores of journalists at the hospital, said he saw Suharto carried out of his car by two of his private security guards.

Suharto's grandson Arie Sigit was seen entering the hospital.

Another witness said he saw at least two of Suharto's children at the hospital, youngest daughter Siti 'Mamiek' Hutami Endang Adiningsih, and his second eldest son-Bambang Trihatmoko.

Juan Felix Tampubolon, one of the lawyers of the 78-year-old former strongman, said Suharto "is not sick."

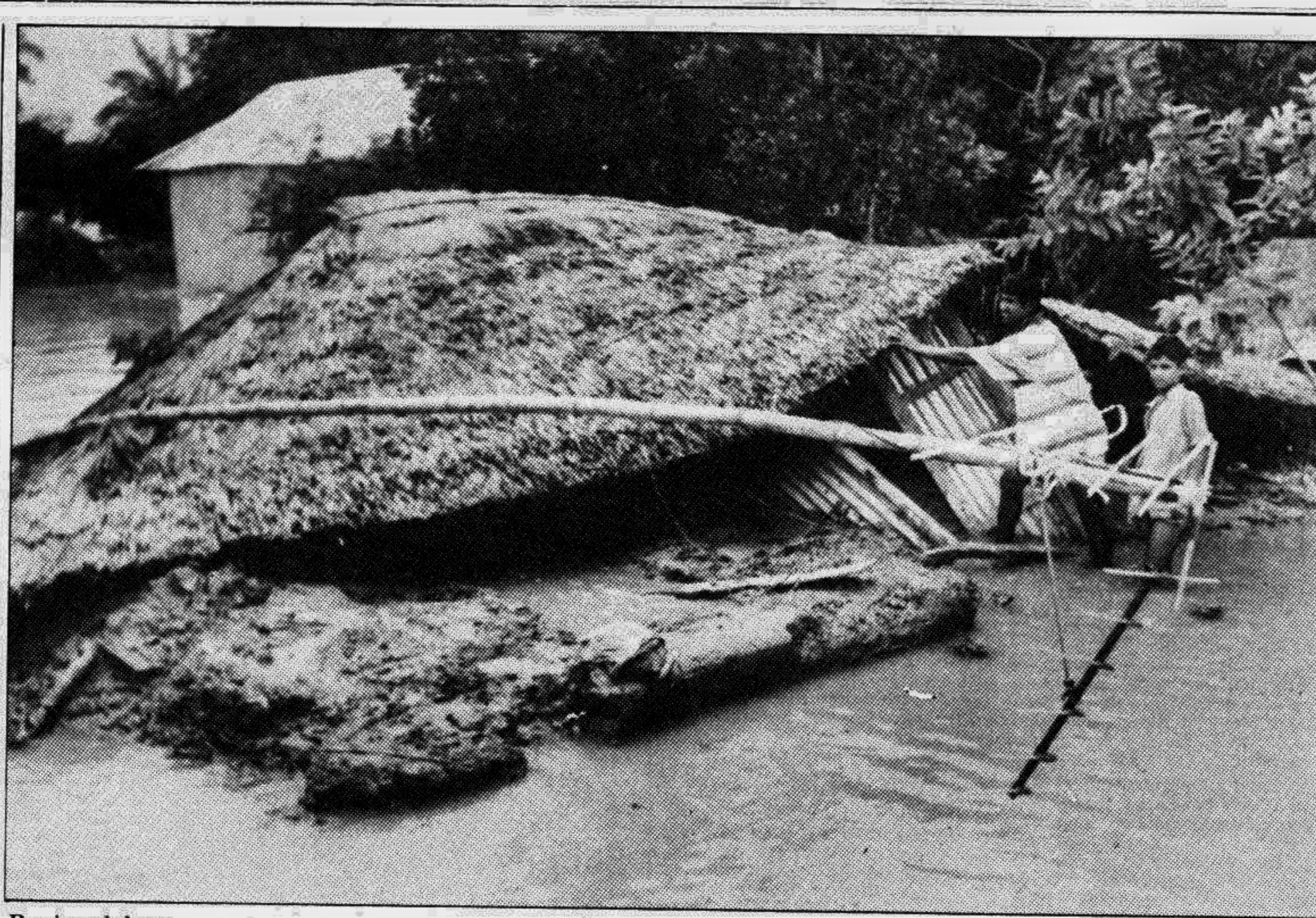
"He has only gone for one of his regular medical checkups," Tampubolon told AFP. He said Suharto was undergoing medical checkups every three weeks or so for urinary tract and blood problems.

Task force to rehabilitate sex workers

A high-level inter-ministerial meeting on rehabilitation of the prostitutes of Tanbazar yesterday decided to form a task force to complete the rehabilitation process smoothly, reports BSS.

Home, Post and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim presided over the meeting held at the home ministry, said a press release.

The meeting discussed in detail the immediate launching of the rehabilitation programme for those prostitutes who are interested to be included in the programme.



Raging deluge

The currents from the River Gumti's breach have flooded away most houses in Burichang thana, Comilla.

—Star photo by Anisur Rahman

'Bangla', not West Bengal and 'Kolkata', not Calcutta

CALCUTTA, July 20: West Bengal Legislative Assembly today unanimously adopted a non-official resolution, proposing change in the name of the state of West Bengal into 'Bangla' and that of its capital Calcutta into 'Kolkata', reports PTI.

Taking part in the hour-long discussion on the motion moved by members of Both Left Front, opposition Congress, Trinamool Congress and SUCI under Rule 185, state's Home (Police) Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee said that change in the name of the state would require ratification of the new house and, finally, the assent of the President.

He said since the Lok Sabha stood dissolved, the copy of the resolution would be sent to the Union Home and Law Ministers for ratification by the new lower house to be formed after the coming elections.

Regarding the changed name of the state capital, he said the state government would immediately act on the house resolution and take necessary steps for its implementation.

Agreement soon Canada to invest in Bangladesh power sector

Canada has committed to invest in Bangladesh's power sector, a Power Development Board (PDB) press release said in Dhaka yesterday, reports BSS.

An agreement to this effect is expected to be signed between the two countries soon.

The commitment to invest in the power sector came when Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Nicholas Ethridge made a courtesy call on PDB Chairman Quamrul Islam Siddiqi at his office yesterday.

Ethridge expressed his country's interest to set up solar and wind driven power stations in the country including Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), sea-shore and coastal belt.

Kennedy's plane plunged faster than previously thought

Divers fail to find any wreckage

AQUINNAH (Massachusetts), July 20: As the Kennedy family broke its silence by expressing 'unspeakable grief', federal investigator said John F Kennedy Jr's plane dropped precipitously and faster than previously thought, reports AP.

"We are filled with unspeakable grief and sadness by the loss of John and Carolyn and of Lauren Bessette," said a statement from Sen Edward Kennedy. "John was a shining light in all our lives, light in all our lives, and in the lives of the nation and the world that first came to know him when he was a little boy."

The single-engine plane Piper Saratoga 32, piloted by Kennedy, took off from New Jersey on Friday night.

After reviewing new radar data, investigators said the plane made a precipitous drop of 330 meters (1,100 feet) in 14 seconds as it approached Martha's Vineyard. That would mean the plane's rate of descent was 1,410 meters (4,700 feet) per minute.

"That airplane would not come down that fast in any normal configuration," said Warren Morningstar, spokes-

Academics against widened VAT net

By Staff Correspondent

A former finance adviser to the caretaker Government has criticised the expansion of the VAT net, saying it would only help the government in the short term.

"The government is widening indirect tax like VAT since it is failing to realise direct tax from the genuine tax payers," Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud said yesterday.

He was speaking as chief guest at a discussion on "National Budget for the year 1999-2000" in the city organised by the Dhaka Branch Council of Institute of Cost and Management Accountants, Bangladesh (ICMAB).

But he added: "If a small businessman is forced to pay full tax, then he will not be able to survive since there are illegal toll collections and bribes."

Speaking on the occasion, Omar Haider Chowdhury, research director of BIDS, said the government's tax projection "over ambitious."

ICMAB President Muzaffar Ahmed called upon the government for adopting cost audit in order to evaluate running costs of an enterprise.

He said that it should be seen

Dockers in Ctg call off today's strike

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, July 20: Chittagong Dock Bandar Sramik Karmachari Parishad, a combine of 22 trade unions has called off its strike scheduled for tomorrow.

The strike was called off as the council committee on port comprising shipping and finance ministries at a meeting in Dhaka in the morning decided to provide the SS-category workers incentive for 75 days.

Ethridge expressed his country's interest to set up solar and wind driven power stations in the country including Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), sea-shore and coastal belt.

Leaders of the trade unions were informed of the decision through Chairman of the Chittagong Port Authority who got a faxed message from Dhaka.

Manikganj

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pm, leaving communication with the capital snapped. Hundreds of vehicles to and from the capital remained stranded on both sides of the road.

Leaders of the main opposition announced to continue road barricade "until the arrest of the killers."

Following the incident the activists of both JCD and BCL took control of their respective areas at gun point, creating panic in the townsmen. Riot police were deployed to avert further clash.

The body was sent to Manikganj Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Meanwhile, the district units of BNP, Jubo Dal and JCD staged a protest rally at the bus stand and held Awami League central leader Col (ret'd) M A Malek and his nephew Israfil responsible for the killing.

Rivers

The Brahmaputra-Jamuna recorded rise at all points. The Padma recorded rise and fall. Most of the rivers in the Meghna and the south eastern hill basin recorded rise. Out of 38 monitoring stations, 8 points were above danger level, 28 points recorded rise and 10 points registered fall, the FFWC said in its river position yesterday.

Elsewhere in the country due to the active monsoon moderate or heavy to very heavy falls are expected. Beginning at 6 p.m. yesterday during the next 48 hours there would be no appreciable change in the situation. But rainfall may decrease gradually during the next five days, the met office said in its extended forecast.

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Floods

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rose with the monsoon rain, last month, but has so far remained below danger level.

But contrary to its normal pattern of rise in August, the Ganges had gone into spate before the Brahmaputra with heavy rains in the foothills of the Himalayas particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar of India and Nepal.

Bihar is still under the grip of floods which has kept the Ganges so far in spate but it had been declining last week and early this week. But the rains again surged the river, being above danger level at Bhagyal in Munshiganj, and the Meghna fed by continuing high flow in Surma and Kushi-yara remained above danger level.

Congestion in Meghna's drainage system had kept the Ganges-Padma at Bhagyal above danger level for the past two weeks before meeting the Meghna on their way to the Bay where tidal pressure was also high keeping the water back, leaving Meghna's erosion in Chandpur and Laxmipur severe, FFWC sources said.

It said there had been excessive rainfall so far in July, much more than the expected combined fall in the entire month which also contributed to the early flooding. But the flood experts said that they are yet to receive any indication that the floods may be as serious as last year's deluge unless there is heavy rainfall throughout the monsoon.

Lower class government employees had been opposing the new office hours which replaced the previous work schedule in the Secretariat of 8-30am to 2-30 pm with 9 am-5 pm with two day weekend introduced by the government in 1996.

They say the new schedule had prevented many of them doing extra work after office to supplement their income. They also rejected recent staggered rise in pay under new scales describing them as inadequate to cope with spiralling prices.

Employee leaders also demanded removal of the finance and establishment secretaries