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Monsoon rains wreck havoc across Asia

HONG KONG, Aug 2: Monsoon rains have left hundreds dead and millions homeless as floods and landslides wreak havoc across Asia, threatening a repeat of last year's disaster which was the worst in decades, reports AFP.

China and India have been worst hit by the deluge, but Vietnam, the Korean peninsula and Bangladesh have also been badly affected.

More than 300 people have already been killed in China this summer in flooding along the mighty Yangtze river and three provinces have declared states of emergency.

Some 1.4 million Chinese have been mobilised to fight the advancing waters and by last month some 1.8 million people had been evacuated from their homes.

Authorities warned Monday that the risk of flooding along the Yellow River, China's second largest, will "greatly increase" this year after rainfall along its middle reaches rose by half.

Severe damage to cities lying along its shores was forecast if the powerful river burst its banks.

The entire Yangtze basin, home to some 400 million peo-

ple, was last year hit by the worst floods since the 1950s, leaving more than 4,000 people dead and causing damage worth 25 billion dollars.

Official corruption and rampant deforestation were blamed as the chief culprits.

In India, where floods began late June after torrential monsoon rains, the death toll has breached the 300 mark, including 135 in the eastern state of Bihar.

The situation in Bihar remained grim, with water levels on five major rivers rising above the danger mark. State opposition leaders have blamed the government for not implementing flood-control measures earlier.

Floods in the northeastern state of Assam are also threatening the world's last major concentration of one-horned rhino - a nearly extinct species. Last year's floods killed 65 of the state's 1,500 rhinos.

At least 40 South Koreans are feared to have been buried in mudslides triggered by torrential downpours which have left swathes of the country under water.

Disaster relief officials warned the toll, so far con-

firmed at 17, was likely to rise sharply as heavy rains persisted.

Nearly 18,000 people have been forced to flee their homes in the north of the country since Saturday as waters rose, disaster officials said.

Weathermen have warned worse is to come as Typhoon Olga approaches the southern tip of the country, threatening further downpours.

Last year record rains left 324 people dead and caused more than a billion dollars in damage.

Meanwhile in North Korea, state radio said emergency teams had been mobilised to tackle severe damage caused to crops and infrastructure.

The starving country, hit by five years of natural disasters that compounded damage to a shattered economy, expected "extensive damage" as a result of the unprecedented rainfall battering its southern region.

Typhoon Olga passed over southern Japan Monday, bringing heavy rains and causing a landslide that killed a 67-year-old woman in the town of Takachiho as she worked in her field. Another 27 people have



That's it Police obstruct BNP procession at Bijoy Nagar in the city yesterday during hartal hours. — Star photo

Bangla-Nepal transit: Businessmen frustrated

Much to the frustration of businesspeople, Bangla-Nepal transit through India virtually remained suspended due to insurmountable hurdles, reports UNB.

The business community, who wants to use the cross-border route for both trade and tourism, pointed out poor infrastructure and absence of a transport agreement among the problems.

Besides, India's rigid control on transportation of goods through its land is another reason for frustrating Nepalese traders using the 48-km transit connecting Bangladesh and Kakarvita, said officials and businessmen back in the capital.

Former Nepalese ambassador Lok Bahadur Shrestha's bid to open a direct bus link for bilateral tourism has also fallen flat, as India did not agree to issue double-entry visas.

Talking to UNB, Bangladesh businessmen expressed strong desire for using Bangladeshi transit for both haulage and tourism.

They also feel Bangladesh should open a full-fledged land port at Bangladesh, facilitating trade with India and Bhutan to make the transit more useful.

India, on the other hand, wants Nepalese traders to use their old route from Calcutta via Haldia.

Trade link with the landlocked Himalayan kingdom is not yet satisfactory as Nepalese traders still find Calcutta port comfortable for external trade through Haldia route.

To divert their attention to Mongla port through Bangladesh, Bangladesh must develop its road and port infrastructures, the businessmen suggested.

The customs office at Bangladesh is still housed in a tin-shed structure where the officials seldom go from their station at Tentulia thana town, 15-km off the frontier.

Road link between Bangla-

bandh and Panchagarh is in bad shape, while Panchagarh-Mongla road connections require further improvements.

A Commerce Ministry official told UNB that the Bangla-Nepal transit remained "in fact ineffective."

"We don't know whether there is virtually any trade through this route," he said.

About the inadequate customs and immigration facilities at Bangladesh, he said the system was yet to be developed because of its low utility and poor return as such.

He said Bangladesh and Nepal needed motor vehicle agreement to maximise the use of the transit.

After years of negotiations, India allowed Nepal to use its land for establishing direct land link with Bangladesh.

Nepal pressed for the transit to facilitate its external trade through Mongla port as it found the route shorter than the existing Calcutta-Haldia route.

Transshipment
Opposition plans to lay siege to Secretariat in September

The opposition alliance is likely to gherao the Secretariat in the first half of September to protest the government move of giving corridor to India, says UNB.

A top leader of the liaison committee told UNB last night that the opposition will lay siege on DC's office and organise mass procession in Divisional headquarters in later part of August.

He said the final programme will be announced today from separate rallies of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikkyo Jote (IOJ).

The liaison committee meets this morning to finalise the programme.

Another feather in Hasina's cap

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been nominated for another prestigious international award, CERES medal of FAO, in recognition of her fight against hunger, says UNB.

She has agreed to accept the award, an official announcement said yesterday.

UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) director-general Jack Driessens will arrive in Dhaka on December 9 to formally award the medal to the Prime Minister.

The DG informed the Bangladesh Ambassador in Rome that FAO had unanimously decided to award CERES medal to Bangladesh Prime Minister.

The FAO chief executive also said that he would personally come to Dhaka to formally award the medal if the Prime Minister agreed to receive it.

Dedicated to the Roman Goddess of Agriculture Ceres, this award has been initiated to honour distinguished women who have played a prominent role in increasing food production and expressed solidarity with the millions who have suffered from hunger.

Persons who have earlier got it include former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Mother Teresa, former Sri Lankan Prime Minister Srimavo Bandernayake, Queen Sirikit of Thailand and President Fynn Bogodattir of Iceland.

Earlier, PM Hasina had been nominated for another UN award for helping peace deal in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. She will go to Paris next month to receive the UNESCO peace award.

Electrocution Villagers attack REB office in Narsingdi

From Our Correspondent
NARSINGDI, Aug 2: At least 20 people were injured in a clash between villagers and employees of Rural Electrification Board (REB) after a pedestrian was electrocuted by a live electric wire this afternoon.

According to witnesses, the incident took place when one Al Amin, 18, a rickshawpuller and an inhabitant of Salda village, was electrocuted as he came in touch with a broken wire of the REB at about 1:00 pm.

The villagers of Salda and Chowla alleged that they had repeatedly requested officials of the REB to remove the unsafe wire since morning but there was no response.

Later, villagers sieged the local REB office and allegedly attacked some employees. They also ransacked the office and damaged furniture and a car of the board.

Six persons were arrested in this connection.

JU students
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law and order and protection of female students.

"The VC, Pro VC and the Proctor will have no moral right to continue in their offices if they fail to file cases against the rapists by today and ensure punishment", the memorandum said.

In the evening, GSU and Ganatantrik Chhatra Oikkyo (GCO) brought out separate processions on the campus demanding immediate arrest of "terrorists" and filing of criminal cases against the "identified rapists". They also told newsmen that they would continue their movement against both the BCL groups - rapist group and killer group.

Meanwhile, one student and two outsiders were arrested from the campus and one LG gun, one cut rifle and 14 rounds of ammunition were recovered during a police raid in the early hours of yesterday. Hundreds of police personnel led by SP of Dhaka Mujibur Rahman raided Kamaluddin, Maulana Bhasani and Salam-Barkat halls from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. Later, a case was filed with Savar thana under the Arms Act.

Some sources said police failed to nab more armed men as they had fled the halls on receipt of prior information about the raid.

The "killer group" returned to the campus yesterday after the "rapist group" left the campus during the police raid in the early hours of the day.

The killer group returned without any resistance as the rapist group took shelter in the nearby Gerua village after the police raid.

The rapist group ousted the killer group from the campus Friday night and captured three of the five halls for male students.

Earlier in October last year, the killer group captured the three halls by ousting the rapist group after most of the leaders of the group were accused or punished for raping a number of JU students over the years. In November, 1997, the killer group was ousted after BCL leader Ananda was killed as a consequence of intra-party feud.

JU Journalists' Association in a statement yesterday expressed concern over the "deteriorating campus situation and demanded immediate action against the killers and rapists. They alleged that the authorities of Kamaluddin Hall obstructed them from collecting news on the return of "killer group".

1 killed in Rajshahi
From Our Correspondent
RAJSHAH, Aug 2: A young man died after he fell under a local train in Dingadoba area under Rajpara thana in the city today.

Witnesses said, the accident occurred when Anup Haldar jumped from the roof top of the train. He was rushed to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in a critical condition where he succumbed to his injuries.

60 hurt in sporadic violence

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and Islami Oikkyo Jote brought out processions and damaged many rickshaws, autorickshaws and auto-tempos.

Police arrested 19 opposition activists from different parts of the city on charges of exploding bombs and damaging vehicles.

A good number of rickshaws and autorickshaws and some minibuses as well as state-run BRTC buses plied on main thoroughfares, including the VIP roads. Movement of rickshaws was almost normal.

Long distance buses did not run but train service was almost normal.

Schools, businesses, shops and private offices remained closed. Attendance in government offices, including Bangladesh Secretariat, was thin.

Transactions in banks was little. The two bourses did not trade.

BNP activists damaged more than a dozen rickshaws at Bijoy Nagar, Kakrail and Naya Paltan areas, trying to prevent their movement. Police fired two teargas shells on pickets in front of BNP central office at Naya Paltan at 11:08am when activists tried to damage rickshaws. The pickets also assaulted many rickshawpullers.

Two crude bombs exploded near the BNP central office when a procession of IOJ marched towards Fakirpool at 11:45pm. None was, however, injured. Tension mounted at Mouchak and Malibagh areas after at least seven hand bombs exploded around 10:35am.

Police chased a procession of Jamaat near Purana Paltan crossing at 8:30am when they tried to proceed towards its city office at Purana Paltan. Police picked one demonstrator from the spot.

Processionists damaged two auto-tempos at Malibagh crossing at 9:50 am. BNP leader Matin Chowdhury was leading the procession, which paraded the streets in Mouchak, Malibagh, Shantinagar, Naya Paltan and Bijoy Nagar areas. Three people were injured at Malibagh crossing while damaging auto-tempos.

BNP processions were obstructed from proceeding towards Jatiya Press Club through the Bijoy Nagar road as police put up barbed wire barricade in the middle of the road.

A huge contingent of riot police and paramilitary BDR were posted around the BNP central office and the adjacent Bijoy Nagar area. Police were also seen guarding different lanes and bylanes in the neighbouring Paltan, Bijoy Nagar and Naya Paltan areas.

Witnesses said police around the BNP office were in a provocative mood.

BNP leaders and workers led by central leaders Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Mirza Abbas, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Major (Retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, Amanullah Aman, Joyal Abedin, Faruq, Khairul Kabir Khokon and Fazul Haq Milon brought out a series of processions in different parts of the city.

According to a police press release, opposition workers damaged the windowpane of a truck at Tongi, early morning. Pickets damaged a bus and a tempo at Nightingale (Kakrail) crossing.

Police said a bus driver was injured when pickets threw a cocktail near Pallabi police station at 11:40 am. Three pedestrians were injured when pro-hartal supporters threw a cracker on a running train at Tejgaon rail gate at 12:10 pm.

Three activists of Ricksaw Sramik League suffered injuries from splinters when pro-hartal activists exploded bombs at the Gold, telephone sets seized at ZIA

Customs surveillance at Zia International Airport (ZIA) recovered gold bars and mobile telephone sets worth about Tk eight lakh from an Indian citizen on Sunday night, reports BSS.

Police said Naboprit Singh who arrived here by a Bangkok-Yangon-Dhaka flight on Sunday night was carrying 120 tolas of gold and five mobile telephone sets illegally.

DCC ward commissioner's office at Demra. The injured - Nazim, Akkas and Hamid - were admitted to DMCH.

Awami League and its front organisations also brought out separate anti-hartal processions at Bangabandhu Avenue, Press Club, Topkhana Road, Motijheel and Shahbagh areas. DCC Mayor Mohammad Hanif, MPs and Chhatra League leaders led the processions.

UNB reports from Munshiganj said that at least 10 people were injured, three by bullets, in a gun attack on a BNP hartal procession during hartal hours.

Local BNP MP Abdul Hye, who took the three bullet-hit people to DMCH, alleged that the ruling Awami League gunmen attacked the peaceful procession without provocation in presence of the police.

The injured were identified as Jubadaul leader Sultan Ahmed, Chhatra Dal leader Babu and passer-by Al Amin. Condition of Sultan was stated to be critical as the bullet remained inside his abdomen while handicapped Al Amin received bullet wounds in his eye and may lose his eyesight.

Meanwhile, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement congratulated the countrymen for spontaneously observing the first day of the 30-hour hartal and urged them to continue observing it upto 12 noon today.

He said people had given a clear verdict against the government's decision to provide corridor to India through observing the hartal. He called upon the government to show respect to the people's mandate through cancelling the decision and halting repression on the opposition.

Bhuiyan alleged that terrorists belonging to ruling Awami League launched armed attacks on BNP supporters in different parts of the country, including Jatrabari and Uttara in Dhaka and Munshiganj sadar.

The BNP leader alleged that Awami terrorists equipped with firearms swooped on a BNP election at Munshiganj town in the morning that left an unspecified number of activists injured.

Anti-hartal procession in city

Different front organisations of the Awami League yesterday brought out separate peace processions in the city protesting 30-hour countrywide hartal, reports BSS.

Dhaka City Awami League, Bangabandhu Sainik League, BCL Awami Seccha Shebak League, Krishak League, Jatiya Sramik League, Hawkers' League and Lalbagh Thana Awami League paraded different city streets chanting anti-hartal slogans. The processionists described hartal as anti-people, illogical and irrational.

Dhaka City Awami League brought out anti-hartal procession from the party central office at Bangabandhu Avenue. City AL President and DCC Mayor Mohammad Hanif led the procession.

The procession over, Hanif said BNP and its allies including the anti-liberation and fundamentalist force Jamaat-e-Islami are hatching conspiracy to create chaos and instability in the country when the government of Sheikh Hasina was implementing different development programmes for the welfare of the people.

He urged the city dwellers to build a strong resistance against all conspiracies hatched by the anti-people evil forces.

The BCL brought out a procession the Dhaka University campus at around 10:30 am. BCL President Bahadur Bepari led the procession.

Jatiya Sramik League brought out a similar procession in the city which started from Shapla Chattar at Motijheel and ended at Paltan Maidan.

General Secretary of the organisation Ahsanullah Master, MP, led the procession.

Speaking at the post-procession rally Ahsanullah Master alleged that BNP along with supporters from its allies - Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami - is trying to destabilise the peaceful atmosphere of the country by calling 30-hour hartal after failure of the so-called road march and long march.

Lalbagh Thana Awami League also brought out an anti-hartal procession in the city. The procession started from Hossaini Dalan and paraded the areas of Chankharpool, Nazimuddin Road, Chakbaraz, Urdu Road, Lalbagh and Azim-pur.

Thana Awami League President and General Secretary Abu Hanat and Humayun Kabir led the procession.

Tulrow
From Page 1

nally included in the Second Round Bidding as an "attraction" only because of its good prospects, it was the first block offered to any foreign company. Some six oil companies including Shell, Mobil, Chevron-Texaco, Petronas and BAPEX submitted bids for this block. Of these, Mobil & Petronas jointly proposed a carried over interest of 20 per cent for BAPEX.

The government had selected Tulrow for its work programme that it would drill 10 exploratory wells in three years at a cost of \$5 million dollars, which experts termed "unrealistic". In Bangladesh, no oil company has any record of drilling more than one exploratory well in three years.

Tulrow made a similar "unrealistic" proposal for Block 11, which was offered to Tulrow's proposal did not have a bank guarantee or any share for BAPEX.

When these two blocks were offered to Tulrow, the government refused to offer more than one block to any other company on the pretext that it was following a "one company-one block" policy.

But now, after Mobil officially withdrew from the Second Round Bidding, a political lobby is trying to revive negotiations on block 9 and 11 through Petrobranga. "The lobby has already sent signals to some big oil companies regarding these blocks. They will soon resume negotiations, specially because the press has become more or less silent on the issue," said a source.

Energy experts said awarding the two blocks to Tulrow will repeat the experience with Scimitar.

In mid-eighties, in a similar fashion, an unknown company named Scimitar was awarded a block in the Surma basin that included the Haripur oil field. Petrobranga was first locked in a conflict with Scimitar when it failed to drill a single well in its initial exploration period.

Scimitar was later found forging Petrobranga's documents to "sell" the Surma block to Occidental. It was also involved in misappropriation of millions of dollars. Scimitar took Bangladesh to the International Court making false allegations but ultimately Bangladesh won. According to an investigation report, the deal was pushed by then, President HM Ershad while some bigwigs were involved in promoting the company.

500 feared killed

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lay side-by-side on the platform.

Prashant said he expected the toll to rise to 230.

But doctors and a group of about 25 local medical students who had been working since 4:00 am said they feared hundreds more would be found in second-class carriages, which are often crammed with more than 70 people each. At least two carriages still had bodies inside, they said.

The Press Trust of India said more than 500 were feared dead.

Officials said the victims were mostly soldiers and Border Security Force personnel.

"It was like a nightmare. It was completely dark and it sounded like a very loud explosion," said Nayak Lakhmi Bora, one of the soldiers who survived the accident with injuries.

He pointed to the carriage in which he had been travelling, which appeared to have flown upwards on the impact and then crushed a carriage of the other train as it came down. "I don't remember how I came down," said Bora.

Another injured passenger, Umesh Kumar, waited for news of his family of six. His brother and his mother were among

four already confirmed dead - his father and sister were still missing.

Thousands of worried people thronged stations in Assam to find out the fate of friends and relatives. The government issued phone numbers for information control rooms set up at 10 stations stretching from Delhi to the east of the country.

Movement of tea, petroleum products and minerals from the northeastern region were expected to be hit by the accident, which compounded problems caused by the bombing of a rail track in the area by Assamese separatist guerrillas on Saturday.

The series of disruptions on the main track will severely affect movement of tea, petroleum oil and lubricants, coal, dolomite and gypsum from the region to the other parts of the country," a railway official said.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), which rules the state of West Bengal, called on Federal Railway Minister Nishit Kumar to resign and for spending on rail development to be made a key issue in the September-October general elections.

India's rail network is the second largest in the world after China's and carries some 13 million passengers every day.

Garments employee gangraped

By Staff Correspondent

A garments employee was gangraped by unidentified youths in an underconstruction building near Khilgaon rail crossing yesterday morning.

Police said the incident occurred when the victim was waiting in front of a petrol pump at Fakirpool at about 6 am for transport.

A young man appeared there in an auto-rickshaw and offered to give her a lift upto Tongi. But he took her to an underconstruction building near Khilgaon rail crossing and raped her along with four other accomplices. Police rescued the victim from the building in an unconscious state and sent her to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where her condition is said to be critical.

A case was lodged with Khilgaon thana in this connection but none was arrested till writing of this report last night.

Benazir's nephew commits suicide

KARACHI, Aug 2: A teenaged nephew of former Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto committed suicide by shooting himself at his Karachi residence, police said today, reports AFP.

Sarwar Ali Talpur, son of a sister of Benazir's jailed husband Asif Ali Zardari, was found dead late Sunday at his residence in the seaside Clifton district.

Police said he was shot in the head with a pistol was found in his right hand. The incident occurred only a few hours before his scheduled departure for Dubai where he was studying, family sources said.

Sarwar's father, Munawwar Ali Talpur and mother Farayal Talpur are both in politics.

Benazir is currently in Britain while Zardari has been in jail facing criminal and corruption cases since the dismissal of his wife in November 1996.



An anti-hartal march by Bangladesh Freedom Fighters' Rehabilitation Society use a crippled street urchin as a frontman yesterday. — Star photo by Anisur Rahman

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