

Flood fury ebbs but erosion goes on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The overall flood situation in terms of water recession is improving, but life in the affected areas has come to a standstill with large numbers of dwellings and vast tracts of cropland washed away.

Receding floodwater is causing severe erosion in several north-western districts, rendering hundreds of families homeless, according to reports received.

Erosion is taking place in fresh areas in Shibaboy and Harirampur upazila of Manikganj and Louhajang upazila of Munshiganj.

The month-long flood, triggered by heavy rain and an onrush of waters from upstream, has affected around 900 unions in 135 upazila of 26 districts, leaving about 40 lakh people marooned.

The water level in both Brahmaputra and the Ganges continue to fall, according to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC).

Although the rivers around Dhaka city are still flowing close to danger level, the flood situation in and around Dhaka is likely to improve.

The flood situation in Manikganj, Munshiganj, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Kishoreganj, Pabna, Tangail, Rajbari, Faridpur, Gaibandha, Bogra, Naogaon, Sirajganj and Jamalpur are also likely to improve.

Official sources said typical post-flood problems, like job crisis and drinking water scarcity, are increasing in to flood-hit areas. Poor people are falling victim to loan sharks and Shylocks. Serious crisis of safe drinking water has ensued as most

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40,000 job cuts this yr, 75,000 by FY06

\$300m WB loan to foot the bill

REJAUL KAIRM BYRON

A large portion of the World Bank's \$300 million development support loans will be spent on shedding excess manpower from the state sector, and this year alone, Tk 1,490 crore will be spent on this.

Some 40,000 staff from different state corporations and manufacturing units will be seen off this year with the support of the bank's loan, according to Privatisation Commission sources.

The commission has targeted 32 industrial units for privatisation this year, 17 of them already closed.

The government has also sent a list of 96 state-owned manufacturing units to the bank for privatisation by FY06. Some 75,000 to 100,000 staff of these units will be axed before being sold off.

The Privatisation Commission and ministries concerned are drawing lists of the staff. These units have some 200,000 staff.

Chairman of the commission Enam Ahmed Chowdhury said the SoE restructuring is required not only to save government spending, but also to increase industrial output and create new jobs.

"Those who will lose jobs will be adequately compensated for," he

said, adding that the employees are not opposed to privatisation. Rather, the vested interest groups within the corporations are trying to hinder the process.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs has recently decided to shed 5,500 staff of three corporations the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation and Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in a letter to President of

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Dhaka's 4 conditions for FTA talks

UNB, Dhaka

The commerce minister yesterday said India would need to fulfil four prerequisites, including special and preferential treatment to Bangladeshi goods, to obtain positive results in the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations in October.

At the July 14-16 foreign minister-level Indo-Bangla Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting in Dhaka, both the coun-

tries agreed to initiate FTA talks in mid-October.

At a press briefing with members of the Overseas Correspondents Association of Bangladesh (OCAB), Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said Bangladesh wants to have some "early harvests" by way of resolving trade disputes with India before going into the proposed free-trade talks.

The FTA negotiations have to start on the basis of already-due

special and differential treatment to Bangladesh as per the WTO charter in the first place.

Consideration of comparative development stages of the two countries, resolving the problem of tariff, non-tariff and para-tariff barriers under one package, and ensuring equitable share of trade by reducing the huge trade gap of one billion dollars are the three other prerequisites he mentioned.

"If these bases are not accepted,

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PHOTO: STAR
 The Dhaka City Corporation bulldozes illegal billboards on Road No. 27 in Dhanmondi yesterday in a drive against widespread outdoor advertisement that adds to vision pollution.

Dhaka-Agartala bus fare fixed at \$10

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two-way fare for Dhaka-Agartala bus service beginning the second week of August will be \$10 (about Tk 590).

Both Dhaka and Agartala will operate two buses a day each one at 7am and another at 2pm local time. The route for the four-hour journey will be Dhaka-Agartala via Bhairab Bazar, Brahmanbaria and Akhaura.

This was decided at a review meeting between Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTC) and Tripura Road Transport Authority (TRTC) in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh team at the meeting was led by BRTC Chairman Advocate Taimur Alam Khandaker and the delegation from Tripura was led by Transport Secretary of the state government D Sarkar.

At a joint press briefing later, a member of the Tripura delegation

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Body of an abducted boy found in a ditch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered a badly decomposed body from a ditch at Rasulbagh in the city, claiming a headway in their probe into the abduction and killing of school boy Tanjurul Islam Mishel, 14, recently.

Son of Saiful Islam, Mishel was abducted on July 5 from near their residence at Dania. The abductors demanded a ransom of Tk 3 lakh from his father.

Mishel was a student of class four at Dania Sunrise Kindergarten.

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PHOTO: STAR

The crisis of safe drinking water is intensely felt in the flood-affected districts like Munshiganj, where village girls struggle to collect water from a tubewell surrounded by floodwaters.

Barapukuria Coal Mine

Govt dumps costly Chinese company

UNB, Dhaka

The government has rejected a proposal of the China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) to continue operation of Barapukuria Coal Mine due to the high operational cost quoted by the Chinese company.

Officials said the CMC, with which state-run Petrobangla is now constructing the mine, quoted 30 dollars for producing each ton of coal.

But, according to State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain, the government found

that the project would not be viable unless the per ton production cost is about 22-23 dollars.

Officials at Petrobangla and some experts, however, said the operational production cost should be even much less, around 10-15 dollars.

They said per ton production cost should be lower as the government has offered to bear the power cost.

The state minister for energy told journalists yesterday that some international companies have shown interest in response to the government tender for management and operation of

Barapukuria Coal Mine.

"We are optimistic about getting a very good price, which will make the project viable," he said.

Petrobangla officials said per ton production cost of 20 dollars for the contractor could make the project viable. They said their target is to sell coal from Barapukuria at slightly above 60 dollars per ton with government expenditure of 40 dollars.

"At 40 dollars, we'll not be able to make the project viable if we've to pay the production and management contractor more than 20

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Govt to form Gram Sarkar on Aug 2 despite HC rule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite a High Court showcase on formation of Gram Sarkar, the government will go ahead with its plan of forming units of the local government body from August 2.

Some 40,392 Gram Sarkar units will be formed in 45 days beginning August 2. One Gram Sarkar unit will be constituted in each of 40,392 wards under 4,488 Union Parishads (UPs).

The President assented to the Gram Sarkar Act on February 27

after it was passed by parliament. On June 6, eminent lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain filed a writ petition challenging the legality of Gram Sarkar.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the ministry has completed training of some 7,000 trainers, who are government officials at the upazila level, to familiarise them with different aspects of Gram

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Criminal bullet-hit in gunfight with cops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged criminal was hit by bullets during a crossfire between police and criminals at east Rampura in Khilgaon yesterday.

According to police, Haq Mian alias Haqya, 35, received two bullets in his legs during a raid at east Rampura at about 1:30am.

Haq, now undergoing treatment at the Orthopaedic Hospital (Pangu Hospital) under police custody, is an accused in a number of criminal cases including two murders in Motijheel area, police said.

When a team of Motijheel police went to raid a house in Rampura to catch Haq and his henchmen, the criminals opened fire.

At least 20 bullets were exchanged during the skirmish, locals said.

Police recovered three pistols and 29 bullets from the spot, but could not arrest the other four criminals.

Police suspect Kasha Liton and Michael alias Biplob were also involved in the attack.

Two cases, one under the Arms Act and the other for attack on police, were filed with the Khilgaon

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Container depot Tongi-bound

Committee formed to finalise new location for ICD

RAFIQ HASAN

The government has decided to move the Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Kamalapur to Tongi in a bid to take the traffic pressure off the capital.

The decision was taken last week at an inter-ministerial meeting with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui in the chair. The meeting also formed a five-member committee headed by Secretary for Shipping Zulfikar Haider Chowdhury.

The committee will recommend suitable places for the ICD after visiting Tongi, according to sources.

The committee which also includes chairman of the Chittagong port, director general of the Bangladesh railway, a representative of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the deputy commissioner of Gazipur, has been asked to submit its report by July 31.

Six state-owned enterprises shut down at Tongi have been bracketed as possible location for this purpose. The enterprises are Nishat

Jute Mills, Kaderia Textile Mills, Zinat Textile Mills, Sat Rong Textile Mills, Kohinoor Battery Manufacturing Company and Lira Enterprises.

The meeting observed the existing location of the ICD is no longer adequate for increasing load of export-import business through containers.

The container handling in Bangladesh is going up by 10-15 per cent every year. Last year, around 5.50 lakh containers were handled through the Chittagong Port and the ICD at Kamalapur. The ICD alone handled around 45,000 containers last year, earning revenues over Tk 622 crore.

The container depot, spreading over 1.36 lakh square metre, was set up in 1987 along the Kamalapur railway station.

Bangladesh began the operation way back in 1976 with only six containers.

The ICD premises has turned into a crime zone of late, and it causes serious congestion to the area. Huge pilferage of goods from the depot was also reported on several occasions.

Joint forces comb Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A 170-member contingent of the joint forces led by two BDR captains and equipped with four motor launches started combing the Sundarbans on the third day of the Operation Spider Web yesterday.

Besides, a helicopter carrying a joint forces team was hovering over Dumuria and Rupsha upazila of Khulna yesterday as part of the drive by police, BDR, coast guard and ansars to flush out outlaws, criminals and their godfathers in the south-western districts.

The border areas are also under strict surveillance by the joint forces to prevent the wanted ones from fleeing the country.

Twenty-two listed criminals were nabbed from different upazila of Khulna on Monday night. The arrested include Golam Kader Bappi, a Juba League leader and an accused in several murder cases, and Juba Dal leader Boing Molla, who is a brother of BNP leader and Ward Commissioner of Khulna City Amanullah Aman, and alleged bomb maker Kujo Alamgir.

Of the arrested, nine were nabbed from Sadar upazila, five from Sonadanga, two from Khalishpur and six including a union parishad member from Mongla.

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