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Sylhet airport remains out of operation

Floods in north, northeast likely to worsen; death toll now 93

STAFF REPORT

Flight operations at MAG Osmani International Airport in Sylhet remained suspended for the second day yesterday as part of the runway was under floodwaters that deluged northern and northeastern districts killing 93 people since July 1.

Water receded from much of the runway, but the side strips were under water, an official of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh told The Daily Star last night, adding flights may resume today if the situation improves.

Army and paramilitary personnel were called out to discipline relief distribution in Sunamganj, flooded by the downpour and runoff from Indian hilly regions.

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Perched on the rooftop of their houses, residents of Bardeshi village at Amin Bazar on the outskirts of the capital clean utensils yesterday, as raging floodwaters have swamped the area, making their life and living dangerously difficult.

Business strike today to protest VAT collection at import level

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All shops and other small businesses in cities and towns will observe a strike today to press the government to stop collecting value-added tax (VAT) at import level and introduction of package system in VAT payment by retailers.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) however urged the Babosayee Shangkhan Olkya Parishad (BSOP), a newly formed national platform of shops and small businesses which has called the strike, to withdraw the programme considering Monday's government decision to strip VAT inspectors of arrest power.

The president of the country's apex trade body, Abdul Awal Mintoo, told The Daily Star last night as the National Board of Revenue (NBR) at a meeting with the FBCCI taskforce

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Drive next month to bring all shop owners under VAT net

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

As part of the ongoing government push to expand the value-added tax (VAT) collection net, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) launches a countrywide drive next month to bring all wholesale and retail businesses in the country under the VAT regime.

According to NBR's primary estimate, Tk 800 crore can be realised as VAT from the wholesale and retail traders. Whereas, in the last fiscal, the VAT collected from this sector amounted to only one-tenth of this estimate, or Tk 80 crore.

The radical and manifold changes the current budget has brought to VAT laws and regulations have drawn sharp criticisms from

the business community, with shopowners protesting for weeks culminating in today's strike.

"The strike will be of no use. The VAT will have to be paid in accordance with the legal provisions put forward in the budget," an NBR official said, adding, however, due to the severe flood crisis the VAT collection deadline has been pushed back to August 31 from July 31.

The official said if VAT is not paid even by the new deadline, appropriate legal actions would follow against the defaulters.

To begin with, in next month's drive, taxmen will collect the minimum amount of VAT from the wholesale or retail traders with a view to establish a 'VAT paying culture' first, sources said. VAT

collection at the optimal level in this sector will be enforced gradually within a couple of years, they added.

According to the current budget, the minimum amount of VAT to be paid by a business enterprise in the capital is Tk 4,200, in other city corporation areas Tk 3,600, in district headquarters Tk 2,400 and at upazila level Tk 1,200.

NBR sources said only a paltry number of shops out of the total 200,000 in Dhaka City pay VAT. At the end of the last fiscal, the NBR sent letters to 50,000 shops in the city notifying them about their due VAT payments and asking them to make VAT registration.

An official of the VAT department of the NBR yesterday told The Daily Star

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BY-POLL CONTEMPT CHARGE Army officer exempted from court appearance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday exempted an army officer from initial court appearance on July 24 for the contempt charges for violating its directive to deploy army at all polling centres during the July 1 Dhaka-10 by-poll.

The court, however, told his lawyer that the officer would have to appear in court if asked in future. It also reminded him to submit his reply in time to the contempt rule the same bench had served on him.

The bench of Justice Abdul Wahhab Miah and Justice Zinat Ara

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Injuries led to Sumon's death, autopsy reveals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Autopsy on Sumon Ahmed Majumder, who died from alleged torture during interrogation in the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) custody early Friday, found internal shock by external injuries caused his death.

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Erratum

In a Daily Star story titled 'Authentication body members blame ministry for distortion,' published on July 11 issue, Afsan Chowdhury's name erroneously appeared as a member of the first authentication committee of 'Bangladesher Swadhinata Juddher Dalipatra.' However, Afsan Chowdhury was a member of the core research team.

NON-COOPERATION TO AUDITORS, GRAFT Auditor general's office goes for action against railway bigwig

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Comptroller and Auditor General's Office has initiated departmental actions against the former additional director general (ADG) of the railway division for denying its audit team access to purchase documents and indulging

in corruption.

Former ADG Begum Rokeya was recently transferred to the auditor general's office at the communications secretary's request and departmental proceedings were initiated against her on five counts of financial irregularities, Auditor General Asif Ali told the Public

Accounts Committee yesterday.

Rokeya allegedly misbehaved with the audit team, declined it access to documents when she was the additional director general (finance) of the railway division and indulged in irregularities and acted beyond her brief in previous offices.

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Dhaka fringe people rush to high ground

STAFF REPORT

The eastern fringe of the capital from Tongi to Kanchpur bridge mostly went under water as the raging floods took a serious turn in 24 hours till yesterday evening with thousands of families suddenly finding waist-deep water in their houses.

Floodwater was still rising in the 18-km-long area that saw rapid unplanned urbanisation despite being classified as flood plains.

Several lakh people in the area have been marooned with hundreds of them moving to high ground evacuating their submerged houses. The worst sufferers are poor people living in shanties.

Highly contaminated floodwater

with sewage floating on inundated roads and inside houses is posing a serious threat to public health in the area.

At places like the densely populated Manda, men, women and children were seen wading through chest-deep water that looked black and was emitting foul smell.

The situation was similar in many other areas including Babar Khola, Tegir Bon, Gang Par, Shona Miar Tak, Jamair Tak, Madhya Para and Baro Para.

Drenched in floodwater, Shamsuddin 70 and his wife Joygyn were seen waiting yesterday noon outside Manda Government Primary School and Haider Ali High School situated on the same

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Man arrested by Rab dies in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An alleged criminal died at a Kushtia hospital yesterday, 10 days after the elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested him with two others in the town.

Jumman Khan, 26, son of Abdu Sobhan of Charkuthipara, died at Kushtia General Hospital, sources said.

The body was handed over to his family members in the noon after autopsy.

On July 10, Rab officials held Jumman, Minar Hossain, 25, son of Abdu Shahid, and Anwar, 30, son of Erfan Ali at Minar's house in the town with two foreign rifles, four bullets and three other weapons, police said.

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Tigers' trial by India today

AL MUSABBIR SADI, from Colombo

Bangladesh will make three changes in the team when they take on India in the opening Super League match of the Eighth Asia Cup at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground here today.

Defending champions Pakistan are pitted against hosts Sri Lanka in the other match, a day-night contest at the Premadasa Stadium.

Bangladesh Television and ESPN will provide live coverage of Bangladesh's match, starting at 10:00am. Star Sports will beam the other game from 2:30pm.

Injured opener Javed Omar will be replaced by Manzarul Islam while out-of-form all-rounder Mushfiqur Rahman makes way for left-hander Faisal Hossain. It will be Faisal's second ODI after his debut against

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