

Floodwaters in Dhaka

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Minister for Relief and Disaster Management Asadul Habib Dulu at the meeting took a swipe at newspaper reports on floods and refuted allegations against partisan distribution of relief. They alleged some newspapers are publishing "untrue" reports.

Kamal, also minister for food, said floodwaters have started receding in the northern districts but are inundating central parts of the country including Dhaka. He said ongoing high tide in the Bay of Bengal is preventing floodwaters' flow into the sea.

He blamed the floods in Dhaka on unplanned urbanisation. "Some unscrupulous people during the terms of all successive governments filled up the flood drainage and low-lying areas."

He urged the international communities, donors and NGOs to extend help to the flood victims. He assured DCC commissioners of adequate relief for the destitute.

Mirza Abbas said over 1.2 lakh victims took shelter at different flood centres in his constituency consisting of Motijheel, Sabujbag and Khilgon.

"Flood has hit hard my constituency and we are trying our best to help the affected people," he said, stressing on co-ordination of different government bodies and other partners, who are operating relief work, so that relief reaches the victims.

Abbas criticised a section of newspapers saying they are providing publishing false reports on floods.

He contradicted a report of the Daily Prothom Alo that said victims of a shelter at Abdul Aziz School did not get relief for a week. "I myself distributed relief there on Tuesday," he said.

Presiding over the meet, DCC Mayor Sadeq Hossain Khoka emphasised co-ordinated and united relief operation irrespective of political choices to care best for the victims.

"We've allocated highest aid for some districts including Habiganj, Shariatpur, Madaripur and Kurigram where we have no lawmakers," Dulu said, negating allegation of partisan relief distribution.

His ministry is allocating aid to those areas which are severely affected, he added.

He said floodwaters submerged at least 55 DCC wards where over 3 lakh people have already taken refuge at different shelters.

BNP lawmaker Salauddin Ahmed

demanding the government to construct an embankment stretching from Demra to Tongi to protect the eastern part of Dhaka.

Lawmaker Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintoo told the meeting that flood has acutely affected his constituency -- Labagh and adjacent areas -- and there is crisis of adequate aid.

Lawmaker Mahub Uddin Ahmed and DCC commissioners demanded enough relief including medical aid for their areas.

BEA URGES GOVT TO DECLARE NAT'L DISASTER

Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) yesterday urged the government to declare the prevailing flood a national disaster considering the magnitude of its effects.

The association in a public appeal yesterday called upon conscious people to be aware of any move aimed to turning relief efforts into party politics. They also asked all not to cash in on the situation by exploiting the victims.

The written appeal signed by Dr Quazi Khaliquzzaman Ahmad and Prof Abul Barkat, president and general secretary of the BEA, underscored the need for effective measures to ease the suffering of the flood victims.

The government should take a post flood rehabilitation programme on habitat, health, education and agriculture and publish the strategy to accelerate it, the statement read.

The BEA observed that floods have submerged two-third of the country and affected about 6 crore people. Crops, homesteads, educational institutions, health centres, place of worship, industries, roads all have been affected by the deluge.

Some 10 crore people may be victimised if the floods linger, making it difficult for cultivation in the next harvesting season, said the statement.

It said about 2.5 crore people have lost almost everything. Many were compelled to sell their belongings including tins of roof, cattle and poultry at a discounted price.

The BEA underlined the need for emergency relief efforts to save the 2.5 crore people from probable sickness through supply of food, water and medicines.

Purchase ability of about 3 crore flood-hit people has been squeezed further. The price hike of essentials has further worsened the lives of the flood victims.

Spurious rice saline

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Wahed, chief of the nutritional biochemistry department of the centre.

"If we fail to stop selling of adulterated saline packets, public health will be at risk, especially in the current flood," said David A Sack, executive director of Centre for Health and Population Research in ICDDR,B.

"The registration number, logo and address of ICDDR, B are very clear on the original packet while the writing is opaque on the adulterated packet," said Ishiaq A Zaman, chief of the external relations and institutional development in ICDDR, B.

The co-operative society urged the health ministry to take necessary steps to stop production and sale of the adulterated rice powder saline packets for the sake of public health.

Society chairman Hamidur Rahman said the price of oral saline produced by ICDDR, B is Tk 7 per packet, while the retail price is Tk 10, but the fake saline is sold at only Tk 6 in the markets.

Since 1982, ICDDR, B's Employees' Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd has been producing the saline made of rice powder with formula invented by the ICDDR, B and they are producing

15,000 packets a day now.

Due to the ongoing devastating flood, the number of diarrhoeal patients at the moment has doubled at ICDDR, B compared to the usual number at this time of the year.

"Some 500 diarrhoeal patients are coming to ICDDR, B everyday, which was 900 during the 1998 flood. Maybe this figure is just a tip of the iceberg as the number of patients is growing everyday," said David A Sack.

Society chairman read out the written statement at the press conference.

Outlaws threaten

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sufficient food and get ready to die," the letters read.

The journalists lodged a general diary (1398, Dated July 28, 2004) with the Barisal Shadar Police Station and sought security for themselves and for their families from the administration.

The Barisal Reporters Unity, Barisal Press Club and Barisal Journalists Union condemned the act of death threats saying it is an anti-freedom of speech activity and demanded the culprits' punishment.

WB okays \$200m loans

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over 90,000 SoE workers, closed down 30 SoEs and privatised a few of them.

The loan, approved by the WB board on Tuesday, also dictates that Bangladesh carry on with reforms in the NCBs, further liberalise trade, modernise tax system, improve the public expenditure management and the administration.

A new time-bound strategy has been agreed between the government, the IMF and the WB. An adviser has been appointed to bring Rupali Bank to the point of sale by the year-end and a management team is being appointed to support the bank. Management advisers have been selected for Sonali Bank and fresh bids for advisers for Janata Bank are being sought.

The WB also noted the government should implement the 12-point directive of the Supreme Court in separating the judiciary from the executive.

WB Lead Economist Anthony Botttrill said on the occasion, "The reforms... are designed to improve the climate for private investment on which the creation of jobs, higher productivity and rising incomes depend. These are crucial for reducing poverty more rapidly."

The board observed the government promised in May 2003 that the gas prices would be increased in September 2003, March 2004 and September 2004, but it missed the first two deadlines. The government however hiked the gas prices by 3.5

percent from July 1 to compensate for its failure to live up to the promise. Further hike of 2.27 percent is due in January 2005.

The WB stipulates the government arrears in the power sector do not exceed more than three months' receivables. Besides, the power authorities should reduce receivables from the private autonomous bodies to no more than six months by December 2004 and three months by June 2005.

The WB also suggested that the government reduce at least 10 percent losses in the SoEs each year.

It maintains that the government has acted to put trade liberalisation back on track after a reversal in the 2004 fiscal year. Average protection was lowered from 25 percent to 22 percent in the previous fiscal year, but the progress was partly reversed in 2004 due to higher supplementary and regulatory duties reintroduced for revenue reasons and average protection edged up again to 25 percent.

The new budget puts trade liberalisation back on track by reducing the top tariff rate from 30 percent to 25 percent along with substantial rationalisation of the multi-tiered structure of the tariff system. The scope of the para-tariff system has been substantially reduced and rationalised. Preliminary estimates suggest the average nominal protection of the new system would come down to 21 percent.

6 killed in Afghan blast

REUTERS, Kabul

Six people, including two UN election workers, have been killed in an explosion in a mosque where the United Nations was registering people for elections that Islamic militants have vowed to disrupt.

The US military in Afghanistan yesterday said at least two people were wounded in the bomb blast in Ghazni province to the southwest of Kabul. A spokesman for the United Nations in Kabul said he knew of only two people killed, both of them Afghans.

10 add judges

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Fazlur Rahman, Abdus Salam Mamun, and Siddiqur Rahman Miah were appointed additional judges on July 29, 2002 for two years' term.

Of them, Abdus Salam Mamun got six months extension as an additional judge.

Robbers hack

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The gang dropped the driver's body and an unconscious Alamgir at Della in Demra before leaving with the truck, which was carrying 15 tonnes of rods, they added.

Demra police retrieved Shahjahan's body with marks of cut wounds on it and the helper at around 9:30am. Alamgir was treated at Mitford Hospital where doctors carried out autopsy on the driver.

Utara police said they are yet to confirm the identity of the culprits and crime scene. A police official seeking anonymity said they visited Ashula with Alamgir, but he also failed to locate the place.

"We've called in the truck owner and shop owner from where the rods were purchased. We may get a view of the incident once they come to the police station," said an officer of Uttara Police Station.

Earlier on Tuesday, Shyampur police found the decomposed bodies of a truck driver and truck labourer from Shyampur truck stand.

12,000 women

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Press Club yesterday.

Policy Leadership and Advocacy for Gender Equality (Plage), a project of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, organised the meeting on Bangladesh overseas employment policy. Mortuza Hossain Mushi, secretary of women and children affairs ministry, chaired the meet.

"The government restricted women to performing household work abroad since 1998. But many women still go abroad to work as house-help as they fall victim to the traps of human traffickers," Mondol told the meeting.

Lack of proper training and language efficiency are the two key reasons for which women become victims of abuse, he noted.

He said the government is going to finalise a policy paper soon to reduce wage discrimination and sexual harassment of women abroad.

Ferdous Ara Begum, joint secretary of the ministry, read out a draft policy paper formulated by the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

The policy focused mainly on job markets, authority, licensing and regulations, role of private sector in overseas immigration programme and foreign exchange remittance issues.

Rina Sen Gupta, officer-in-charge of International Migration Organisation, said the policy should focus on capacity building of women and coping strategy with their workplace before going abroad. She suggested the government to approve loan for safe migration of women.

She said Bangladeshi missions abroad should build a network among expatriate Bangladeshi women workers and human rights organisations of the concerned countries to check abuse at workplace.

One Biman staff

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press release issued yesterday.

Departmental proceedings were under way against the persons responsible for the incident, it added.

The authorities of the national carrier also apologised to its passengers for their inconvenience created during BG Dhaka-Saidpur flight.

Biman officials made passengers of the flight, which took off more than three hours behind schedule, twice to board the wrong aircraft.

2 robbers die

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in the afternoon following the statement of two other members of the gang, who were arrested at a hotel in Chittagong on Tuesday night.

Sensing presence of the police, the robbers opened fire. Police also returned fire, leading to gunfight that continued for an hour.

During the gunfight, two robbers, identified as Shahbuddin and Chasmayia, were shot dead and five policemen injured with bullets.

Identity of the injured policemen could not be known. Police recovered three guns and three cartridges from the scene.

Additional Superintendent of Police Abul Kamal Azad told the news agency that gunfight was going on between police and robbers in the hilly forest as police tried to nab rest of the gang and seize their firearms and ammunition.

Heavy rain forecast

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prolong, if the gushing waters from upstream continue to roll and the sea remains rough at the same time, official news agency BSS reports.

The total recession of floodwaters will take at least two to three weeks if the sea remains calm and the water run-off from upstream slows down, the experts told the seminar organised by the Centre for Water, Environment and Energy at the National Press Club.

The situation in the north and northeast improved further with the significant recession of water from farmlands, but farmers face a severe seed crisis.

DHAKA DELUGE

The deluge in Dhaka and environs will deteriorate, private news agency UNB said quoting the latest warning backed up with harsh signs that all nine rivers around the capital swelled further and would rise more in coming days. Yesterday's rains twinned with a relentless rush of water from upstream sent the rivers surging.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre in its bulletin said water levels rose further in the Shitalakkha, Balu, Bangshi, Dhaleswari, Kaliganga, Turag, Buriganga and Tongi Khal, all flowing high above danger marks for over a week now.

City-planner Professor Nazrul Islam told UNB that narrowing Gulshan-Baridhara Lake was a major cause of Gulshan and adjoining areas going under water.

"Floods did not affect the Dhanmondi area as Dhanmondi Lake is still as it is and also for the western embankment," he said.

Holding their belongings over their heads, residents waded through the waist-deep floodwaters, which mixed with sewage and turned blackish and foul-smelling.

Millions of people in Bangladesh are without adequate food or clean

water, a senior government official told AFP as the death toll in floods that have submerged two-thirds of the countryside rose to 400.

The government was distributing relief and assessing the situation to decide whether to issue an international appeal for assistance, said Tajul Islam, press secretary to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

"Millions are affected and are in need of food and clean water," he said. "The government is assessing how much assistance will be needed to tackle both the current situation and the situation after the flood when massive rehabilitation will be undertaken."

The flood situation in Habiganj showed a little improvement as the floodwaters started receding from swamped areas with a fall in the Khowai river, but most houses, businesses and government offices remained 2 to 3 feet under water and road links between the district headquarters and seven upazilas remained cut off.

Our correspondent from Comilla said: The floods swamped fresh areas in Comilla where nine people died and 12 lakh people have been marooned since the deluge hit the district on July 10. Heavy rains and overflows from the Meghna river hit nine of 14 upzilas in the district.

The Flood Forecasting Centre said the flood situation in Sylhet, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar and Netrokona continued improving, while the situation in Tangail, Dhaka, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Narayanganj and Chandpur is likely to remain unchanged.

The floods in seven upazilas, including Dhunat, in Bogra remained unchanged. Officials at the District Relief and Rehabilitation Office said the floods affected 6,29,023 people there.

(AFP and BSS contributed to this report)

Miseries at Manikganj

FROM PAGE 1
"WE'AT ONCE A DAY"

"The relief centre provides khichuri once a day and that is what we eat here," said primary school student Rupali, who along with 200 women and children have taken shelter at a school.

"I have been living at Aricha Belayet Hossain High School flood shelter for the last eight days along with 100 other flood-hit people, but I have received no relief till now," said Maleka Begum, secretary of Shibalaya upazila Mohila BNP unit.

"SIR, TAKE MY NAME"

A number of women including Saleha, Anwara and Momtaj of Shibalaya and Hazera, Kabila, Mariom, Rizina and Lucky of Manikganj municipality wanted their names to be put on food distributing list.

"Sir, take my name," uttered Momtaj in a feeble voice, adding, "I have been starving for last two days."

"WE WILL STARVE RATHER THAN TAKING SUCH RELIEF"

There were also people like Nessa Banu, a 65-year-old woman from Falsatia, who complained of receiving rotten rice in the relief packet yesterday morning.

At Barangal village, she showed this correspondent a packet containing two kg rice, potato and onion that were rotten.

"It is better to starve than taking this sort of relief," she said.

NGO RELIEF

Community Development Centre (CDC), an Aricha-based NGO, yesterday distributed a pack of 20-kg rice, 2-kg pulses, 1 litre oil, 1 kg salt, 6 candles and 4 match boxes among 1,000 families each in Shibalaya.

Arta and Teota unions.

LIFE ON HIGHWAY

Thousands of people are living on Dhaka-Aricha highway with their cattle and other belongings.

Their miseries are mounting day by day due to crisis of food and drinking water.

DISEASES

Water-borne diseases have broken out in seven villages of Shibalaya and Daulatpur upazilas, said locals.

DOUBLY DISTRESSED

Around 3,000 flood-hit families of Jafarganj of Shibalaya, and 28,000 families of Bachamura, Charkatari, Baghatia and Zionpur of Daulatpur upzilas are now doubly distressed since the Padma had devoured their houses about two months ago.

They moved to the Padma-Jamuna Embankment to take shelter.

No relief reached the remote area since yesterday, they said.

"WE HELP OURSELVES"

People finding no place at government flood shelters are taking refuge in nearby houses still safe from floods.

"We help ourselves," boasted 50-year-old Faiz Uddin of Balitha village. "A flood-hit family is at my house along with their belongings and they will stay as long as my house is not inundated."

He went on, "We share our food with them at this time of gajab (deluge) and I believe we can overcome the problem this way."

BOAT-MAKERS AND BOATMEN

Boat-makers and boatmen seem happy that their earnings are on the rise since the flood started as boats and rafts of bamboo and banana tree are the only modes of transport in flooded areas.

Khaleda flies

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election, will also include, for the first time, Nepal and Bhutan, who were drafted in as full-fledged members of the maritime club in a BIMST-EC ministerial meeting in February.

A foreign ministry announcement said yesterday that Dhaka, which signed the free trade agreement (FTA) with six other member countries after delay of three months, would focus on fostering stronger commercial and economic cooperation at the summit.

Bangladesh and other less-developed countries-- Burma, Nepal and Bhutan-- will have to reduce tariffs by 2011, according to FTA. The more affluent BIMST-EC members Thailand, India and Sri Lanka will phase out tariffs on fast-track products by 2009.

The BIMST-EC countries with a combined population of 1.3 billion and an intra-trade value of \$3 billion last year outweigh Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) as an economic union. The Saarc countries have also ratified a FTA, the South Asian Free Trade Area.

Tariffs for non-fast track products will be phased out in developing countries by 2012 and in less-developed countries by 2015 while duties on more 'sensitive' products would be discussed between 2005 and 2007.

The issues of anti-terrorism

EPB teams to assess loss in flood-hit RMG units

UNB, Dhaka

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) has formed four survey teams to assess the losses caused by the ongoing flood in export-oriented garment industries.

In an attempt to prepare a post-flood action plan, three of the teams will visit Dhaka while the other will be sent to Narayanganj to conduct the survey in garment and knitwear industries.

The teams were formed at a discussion meeting held at the EPB office yesterday with its Vice-Chairman Meer Shahabuddin Mohammad in the chair.

Representatives from readymade garment industries, hosiery, leather, leather goods and footwear, handicrafts, jute and jute-made products, agri-products and other export-oriented industries attended the meeting to discuss overall flood situation.

Later, the vice-chairman and representatives from Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters' Association visited flood-hit garment industries in capitals' Malibagh, Basabo, Rampura and Badda areas.

Magistrate's

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However, as he stepped aside to let the magistrate complete the necessary procedure, the mobile court stopped a private microbus and searched it. The driver also was found guilty of not carrying his driving licence.

The photojournalist heard the driver tell the magistrate that the microbus belonged to the assistant private secretary (APS) to Minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Kamrul Islam.

The mobile team immediately let go of the driver, to the sheer dismay of the photojournalist.

He then took it upon himself to ask the magistrate why he was found guilty and fined for his indiscretion while the driver of the APS to the minister drove away scot-free. "I asked him why the driver of a minister's APS received privilege over me. We hold equal rights as citizens of a democratic country!"

"But as soon as I protested the magistrate told me that I was under arrest on charges of contempt of court and kept me under arrest for the following hour," added the photojournalist.

The magistrate then released him after one hour without citing any reason.

No place

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please give me work," he begged.

No relief has reached in Sadar thana's Mahishashur union as yet although floodwaters swamped the area 17 days ago, the locals said Tuesday. Mahishashur Union Parishad Chairman Tofazzal Hossain clashed with the members over distribution of two metric tonnes of rice as relief on Sunday, the chairman himself admitted.

Most of some 300 knitwear, garment and small industrial units in Narsingdi district have also gone under floodwaters, leaving thousands of workers jobless.

Hundreds of weavers have become homeless and are living on a little or no food and out their days in the open as 95 percent areas of the district have been flooded. Some 1,200 people are living in flimsy houses on highways and are in fear of losing their last refuge, as the waters are threatening to submerge the roads.

Gaibandha

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I went to rent 10 katha of land for sprouting up seedlings. But the landowner demanded 10 maund (400kg) paddy off my harvest," Rahman said.

Samaj Kalyan Sangstha (SKS), a local NGO, elevated an acre of land in Sardarer Char, making the place home for about 200 families and 50 cattle for the past one month.

On certain elevated plots in the shoal, a few farmers grew seedlings along their homes, which were unaffected during the flooding. The amount, however, is so insignificant that most people of the shoal areas would not be able to utilize the plants if incentive were not offered immediately, locals said.

Mohammad Haran Fakir of Sardarer Char said he was thinking of sowing seeds of maize this year as corn, instead of paddy, would help him sustain the upcoming lean period.

The SKS would provide him free seeds for harvesting the corn variety, he added. Looking at the vast plains across the Brahmaputra, Haran, 55, said, "I know I will not have problem with seeds and maize would be my rice in times of hardship."

Like the farmers of Kanchapara and Sardarer Char, thousands of farmers in Bagbari, Deluabari, Digahkandir Char, Moinua, Gabgachhi, Patilbari, Guabarir Char and Teugrakandir Char are in desperate need of young plants and seeds for next season.

According to the deputy director of Agriculture Extension Office, seedlings on more than 3,080 hectares have been damaged in the district during the severe flood.

Tigers take on

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ESPN will beam the match live. The game was left with only an academic interest after India's thrilling four-run win against hosts Sri Lanka on Tuesday night which turned out to be a dress-rehearsal for August 1 final.

For Pakistan the 'bonus point system' is sure to haunt them throughout the game against Bangladesh after Inzamam Haq's men lost that crucial one point during a 59-run win over India.

"It is a dead match from everybody's point of view. But we have not played well in this tournament and we will go out there to prove a point. That's our last wish," said Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore after yesterday's practice session at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground.