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## Floods ease, not hunger

NEWS DESK

Hunger was writ large on the faces of displaced flood victims now waiting to go back home after monsoon flooding that deluged two-thirds of Bangladesh eased a little more yesterday.

As many as 2,59,938 people took refuge in 227 temporary shelters in the capital and many of them are thinking of rebuilding their homes as floodwaters continued to recede slowly with water levels in rivers coming down.

This year's floods that echo the 1998 deluge have left millions of people without adequate food or clean drinking water and killed another 42 people, bringing the death count to 586 since July 10.

Official news agency BSS quoting the health department said about 10,000 people contracted diarrhoea yesterday with 715 in Dhaka that is reeling under stagnated filthy water.

The spate of flooding surged with new fury in eroding bank lines of receding rivers engulfing hundreds of houses and bazaars especially in the northwestern, central and southern districts.

The Brahmaputra-Jamuna and the Ganges-Padma continued to fall at all points and most rivers in the Meghna and the southeastern hill basins receded further.

Despite water recession, the Flood Warning Centre said, the water level in the Buriganga, Balu

and Turag were flowing above danger marks yesterday, blocking the way of filthy waters out of the capital.

Our Sylhet correspondent said two minor children, 7-year-old Bilkis and her six-year-old brother Jafir, drowned in a village pond in Companyganj upazila yesterday morning.

The United Nations agencies are set to distribute relief in the coming days, as 10 million pound was granted by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said in a press release.

Hospitals and temporary medical centres in flood-ravaged districts said they treated more than 100,000 patients over the last three weeks, but most deaths took place in remote areas that remained cut off by road and rail.

Although river levels were falling, water was receding at a slow rate and about 5,000 shelters across the country were still crowded with homeless flood victims.

The flooding inundated 40 of the 64 districts and left about 30 million people homeless or cut off. The cost of the damage to property and infrastructure was put at 6.6 billion dollars.

Germany in reaction to the flood situation has committed about Tk 17 million to several projects of humanitarian aid to the flood victims, the Embassy of Germany says

in a press release.

Thousands of people struggle to reach food and drinking water -- many swimming across the floodwaters, while the UNDP said the

severity of the situation prompted the UN agencies to join the relief campaign to fill the gaps, BSS said. (BSS and AFP contributed to this report)

## PM for permanent anti-flood steps

Stresses dredging, anti-erosion moves

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the ministries concerned to prepare for executing permanent measures to tackle floods once the current flooding is over.

The prime minister gave the directive while exchanging opinions with some ministers during receiving donations for flood victims at her office.

On her first working day yesterday after return from Bangkok, she received cheques for about Tk 2.37 crore and medicines worth about Tk 20 lakh from health ministry and its various organisations, science and ICT ministry, water resources ministry, Bepza, Standard Chattered Bank and Rajshahi University.

Health Minister Dr Khandokar Mosharraf Hossain and State

Minister for Health Mizanur Rahman Sinha, Science and ICT Minister Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, Water Resources Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed and State Minister Goutam Chakravarty handed over the donations. Besides, Bepza chairman, CEO of Standard Chattered Bank and vice-chancellor of Rajshahi University made donations on behalf of respective organisations.

Prime Minister Khaleda particularly asked for making lasting arrangements for preventing river erosion and dredging rivers as part of permanent measures to prevent floods.

It has been mentioned that Bangladesh and India discussed joint water management and flood monitoring during the bilateral talks between Prime Minister Khaleda and her Indian counterpart

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## AL candidate leads in peaceful Gazipur polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League candidate Zahid Ahsan Russell was leading with a margin of 25,776 votes against his main challenger MA Mannan of the ruling BNP in Gazipur-2 parliamentary polls held peacefully yesterday.

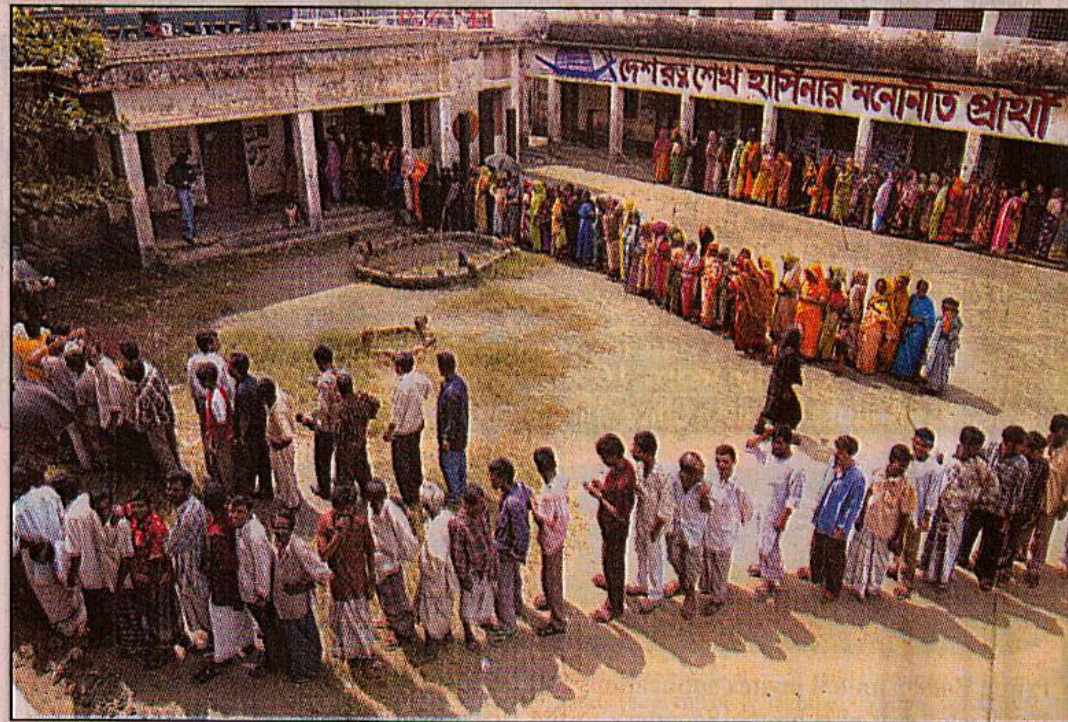
Russell polled 59,096 votes against Mannan's 33,320 in 79 of 195 centres when reports last came in last night. Jatiya Party (Ershad) candidate Kazi Mahmud Hasan was trailing with a paltry 6,047 votes.

After boycotting three consecutive by-elections -- Kustia-1, Munshiganj-1 and Dhaka-10 -- the main opposition participated in a poll for the second time under the Khaleda Zia administration.

AL candidate Ahsanullah Master won at the constituency in 2001 and 1996 general elections while BNP candidate MA Mannan was elected in 1991.

Thousands of enthusiastic voters queued up at many polling centers at the beginning of polling to elect a lawmaker from eight in the fray for the country's second largest constituency.

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Voters form lines around the bricked scene at Naogaon Government Primary School in Tongi, where Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master was gunned down on May 7. Gazipur-2 constituency that fell vacant with the killing went to polls.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

DISPLACED AND DESPERATE: An elderly woman cries among a throng of hungry people waiting for relief at a flood shelter in Gopibagh in Dhaka yesterday.

## Quiet went the polling

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unlike in the controversial Dhaka-10 by-poll held on July 1, ruling coalition cadres and its adherents had a quiet time at the polling centres yesterday during the voting in Gazipur-2 constituency.

The polling agents of all candidates were present at every centre. "I have never witnessed such a peaceful voting in my life," said a Tongi correspondent of a vernacular daily who visited around a dozen polling centres.

"This is the first time that we could cast vote without fear and hassles," said Abdur Rahim of Tongi Auch Para who cast his vote around 9:00am. Rahim noted the voting was peaceful because both the main rival candidates are strong contenders.

The ballot pits ruling BNP-led four-party alliance candidate MA Mannan against main opposition Awami League's Zahid Ahsan Russell, also the elder son of assassinated AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master. The seat fell vacant at the death of Ahsanullah at a rally in Tongi on May 7.

Significant numbers of supporters of the front runners were present at the centres but they remained calm and did not attempt to create

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## Tk 271cr subsidy on imported fertilisers okayed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government in a major policy decision yesterday approved a Tk 271-crore agricultural subsidy to make three types of imported fertiliser available to the flood affected farmers at 25-percent reduced price.

Highly placed sources said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia approved the subsidy as per a recommendation of a five-member committee headed by State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

The high-priority committee was formed at the prime minister's instruction to assess the agricultural losses brought about by the ongoing flooding and recommend measures to recoup that as well as safeguard farmers from further damage.

The rest of the committee members are the principal secretary to the PM and the secretaries of ministries of finance, agriculture, and fisheries and livestock.

The committee will sit again on August 7 to decide on further recom-

mendations based on the latest assessment of agricultural damage.

Official sources said private sector enterprises usually bulk import the three kinds of fertiliser -- Triple Super Phosphate (TSP), Murate of Potash (MOP) and Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP). The allocated Tk 271 crore will be used to compensate the traders to sell these fertilisers at 25-percent reduced rates to farmers.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the decision to provide subsidy on imported fertilisers is the first-ever in Bangladesh. It will help the flood-hit farmers cultivate the next crops and increase agricultural production.

The state minister said every year around 55,000 metric tons (mts) of TSP fertiliser is produced locally and around 400,000mts is imported, while for MOP and DAP fertilisers the country entirely depends on imports.

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## Gazipur minority intimidated

SHIAKHAWAT LITON, back from Gazipur

Amulla Chandra Mandal, 50, and his wife Maya Rani Mandal, 40, refrained from exercising their franchise in the Gazipur-2 by-election yesterday after local BNP activists had raided and ransacked their house at the dead of the previous night and threatened them with death if they went to vote.

"I am mentally upset. I feel helpless and am worried about my safety. I don't know what to do," Mandal

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## Votes of protest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Every ballot Awami League candidate Jahid Ahsan Russell got in Gazipur-2 by-polls is a protest against the gruesome assassination of his father Ahsanullah Master, the family said.

"We count every ballot as a unique protest against the killing of my husband, who won hearts of local people by his hard work, honesty and love for them," said Farida Ahsan, wife of the slain Awami League (AL) lawmaker.

"People have not cast their votes

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## No river linking without talks

Morshed tells of Delhi's apparent policy shift; no troops request for Iraq's Muslim force yet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said yesterday India has agreed on regional co-operation in water sharing management, apparently a major shift in Delhi's policy to common rivers between the two countries.

India assured that it wouldn't implement its proposed river-link project without consulting the

regional countries concerned, he told reporters at his office at the foreign ministry.

Bangladesh has always been arguing that upper and lower riparian countries should work together on regional water management. "I thought that they have approved our proposal."

Delhi's consent to Dhaka's proposal came during the meeting

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## Observers term polls peaceful

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different observers to the Gazipur-2 by-election yesterday said the election was held peacefully except some stray incidents of irregularities.

Brotee in its election observing report said although the election was held peacefully, the turnout of voters, especially of minority and women voters, was very low.

Brotee according to its observers' report said the voters' turnout ranged between 40 and 45 percent. It said flood and locals' despair stemmed from the killing of Ahsanullah Master MP accounted for low turnout.

Democracywatch observed that the election was fair and peaceful and voters showed up spontaneously as there was no presence of

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## World trade deal gets thumbs up

REUTERS, Geneva

Rich and poor nations struck a crucial deal yesterday to relaunch global trade talks and slash billions of dollars in farm subsidies, open industrial markets and boost global growth.

The accord, which restores the World Trade Organization's (WTO) credibility by putting its troubled Doha Round back on track, was hailed as "historic" by exhausted negotiators.

But commentators and analysts said the deal was only a small first step and that many of the toughest decisions on lowering barriers to international commerce were still to

be taken.

After five days of wrangling, the WTO's 147 member states gave a framework laying down the guidelines for the round, which has been in trouble since the collapse of talks almost a year ago in Cancun, Mexico, when no deal on subsidies was found.

"This is a historic moment for this organization," WTO chief Supachai Panitchpakdi told a news conference after the adoption of the pact at a late-night session at the WTO's headquarters.

The hard-won deal on a series of contentious trade issues, from farm reform to the launch of negotiations

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## Sri Lanka on course

AGENCIES, Colombo

India were staring at defeat under lights as they found themselves stuck in no mans land at 147 for eight in the 40th over in the final of the 8th Asia Cup at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

Chasing 229 for victory, the Indians came up against some inspired new-ball bowling first up

from Chaminda Vaas and Nuwan Zoysa who took a wicket apiece.

Sachin Tendulkar made a painstaking 74 but was bowled by Tillekaratne Dilshan's off spin while trying to sweep when he was needed most. He was the seven man out. A little earlier, Mohammed Kaif was taken in deep extra cover off Upul Chandana.

Opener Virender Sehwag was

lucky to survive a confident appeal for leg before in the very first over from Vaas but fell to an identical ball in the third (15 for 1).

Number three Sourav Ganguly could not resist nibbling at a Zoysa ball that angled across him outside the off stump. Mahela Jayawardene, fielding at a wide slip position, dived to his left and snatched a

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