

UN calls donors meet for relief coordination

Wasa struggles to drain out Dhaka's stinking stagnant water, flood recedes by a trickle

NEWS DESK

The severity of devastation by floods that blighted about 30 million people has stretched the government's response systems, the United Nations said yesterday.

Floodwaters are receding by a trickle after submerging up to two-thirds of the country, but many residents are still cut off and in dire need of food and clean water.

The United Nations said it would hold a donors' meeting tomorrow to coordinate immediate relief and launch an international appeal next week to raise funds for post-flood rehabilitation,AFP said.

"Normally the (Bangladesh) government handles the annual flooding caused by the monsoon but the early onset of heavy rains this year has stretched their response systems," said UN Resident Coordinator Douglas Courts.

"The UN agencies along with the donor community and non-governmental organisations are helping to fill the gaps in this relief effort," he said.

The flooding, which laid property and infrastructure waste in 6.6 billion dollars, is the heaviest seen in Bangladesh since its worst ever floods of 1998 which left more than 700 dead and 21 million homeless, AFP reports.

The disaster management ministry said about 1.5 million people were languishing in 4,994 shelters, while Unicef said a large number of children and women who have taken refuge in makeshift shelters run the risk of contracting diseases, official news agencyBSSsaid.

WASAEFFORTS

The Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) is struggling to pump wastewater and floodwaters out of the capital into surrounding rivers as sluice gates remained closed for 24 days.

The floodwaters have submerged around 800 kilometres of Wasa pipeline, which includes 600 kilometres of water supply line, 150 kilometres of sewer and 50 kilometres of drainage line.

Wasa has set up 104 pumps in a series of areas including Rampura, Janapath, Nababganj, Shahidnagar, Islambagh, Swarighat, Kalunagar and Sikder Medical College Hospital.

Wasa set up about 50 pumping machines beside Rampura Bridge in Khilgaon, 44 of them are now working. The Water Development Board in a press release on Sunday said it set up six powerful pumping machines with a capacity to pump out 81 cubic feet water a second.

"The pumps we are using are old and mostly run on diesel engine that is less efficient than the electric ones," a Wasa official said.

Officials said the encroachment

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8



PHOTO: AFP

Flood victim Tahamina holds a packet of saline replenishment salt in her teeth as she swims through floodwaters in Dhaka yesterday. A massive health crisis is looming as sewage mixes with floodwaters and United Nations representatives warn that millions of people face a heightened risk of disease and are calling for international aid.

PM reiterates call for int'l help

UNB, Atrai hazar

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the international community to come forward responding to her call for assistance for the flood affected people of Bangladesh.

She appealed to the world community while addressing the flood-stricken people at Jhaupara in Atrai hazar upazila of Narayanganj district.

"The magnitude of flooding this time is heavier than the floods that swept the country in 1998 and a decade back in 1988," she told her audience, adding: "International assistance is necessary to cope with the damages done by the natural calamity."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Khaleda seeks Dutch help in flood control

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed the hope that the Dutch government would help Bangladesh develop a lasting flood control system and take part in post-flood rehabilitation.

She was speaking to the outgoing Dutch Ambassador to Bangladesh Sjef Ijzermans who made a farewell call on her at the Prime Minister's Office.

Ijzermans said the Netherlands, that developed an expertise in water management, is now working in different fields including water, health, education and rural electrification in Bangladesh.

The envoy said after his return to the Netherlands he would make

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Floodwaters in city to last longer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Floodwaters are unlikely to subside quickly from the capital as the rivers Shitalakhya, Balu and Meghna might flow above the danger level for another week, experts said.

The flooded eastern and central Dhaka saw further recession of waters yesterday and the trend may continue for the next 72 hours.

"At the rate of recession till yesterday, water levels of the three rivers (Shitalakhya, Balu and Meghna) are unlikely to recede below the danger level in another week," said Selim Bhuiyan, executive engineer of Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC).

Meteorological department

SEE PAGE 11 COL

NEWS ANALYSIS

Fair polls possible if government wishes

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Gazipur by-polls have once again proved that if the government is sincere to assist the Election Commission (EC) and the ruling party does not interfere in voting, it is possible to mirror people's verdict in elections under a political government.

There are a raft of reasons for the government's non-interference in the polls, but political observers believe the ruling party ultimately emerged benefited from the election despite the defeat of its candidate.

After a set of controversial by-elections under political governments since Magura-2 by-polls, the provision for general elections under a neutral caretaker government was incorporated in the constitution.

The controversial Dhaka-10 by-polls on July 1 won by BNP candidate Mossadak Ali Falu once again destroyed credibility of by-elections under the four-party coalition government of

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

The Gazipur poll is obviously better than 16 previous by-polls held during the Eighth Jatiya Sangsad. Many poll watchers and political analysts feared widespread rigging and violence in the by-polls, but no major untoward incident took place during the eight-hour voting.

The turnout of voters soared to 57.52 in Gazipur in a festive environment, up from less than 50 percent in three previous by-polls -- Netrakona-3, Munshiganj-1 and Dhaka-10.

Political analysts say the government did not interfere in the polls to restore its credibility and erase the stigma of controversial Dhaka-10 by-election.

The coalition government did not comply with the High Court order and the Election Commission's request for deployment of army in each polling centre in Dhaka-10.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Gazipur by-polls no-trust to govt:

Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the people of Gazipur expressed no-confidence in the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition in the Gazipur-2 by-polls.

"It's not only a victory, but a protest and revenge for the killing of Ahsanullah Master, MP," she said when the newly elected lawmaker for the seat Zahid Ahsan Russell along with the leaders and activists of district Awami League (AL) called on her at the party's Dhanmondi office yesterday evening.

Hasina, also president of the AL said, "The election proved ballot is always mightier than bullet."

She alleged the ruling coalition planned to snatch the constituency by killing Ahsanullah, but people gave their verdict against the politics of bullet and crime pursued by the ruling alliance adherents.

Russell, youngest lawmaker and son of slain legislator Ahsanullah, sought cooperation of all to work for the development of his constituency.

AL presidium members, central leaders and lawmakers were also present.

Earlier, Russell placed a wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi.

Malaria strikes capital

Labs find up to 50pc tests positive

NAIMUL HAQ

Malaria has broken out in the capital and a large number of people are already infected with 'deadly malaria parasites', experts said.

Diagnostic centres Medinova, Padma, Popular and Lab Aid, some private hospitals and the ICDDRDB told The Daily Star they found malaria positive cases ranging from 5 to 50 percent of the number of tests for malaria they conducted in the last one year.

Experts studying blood samples of hundreds of patients infected with malaria parasites said many of the 'malaria positive cases' have either been misdiagnosed or do not have any symptoms, which could endanger their lives.

Investigations showed many doctors mistakenly diagnosed malaria as dengue, typhoid, and influenza and in some cases as jaundice because of their symptoms are similar to that of malaria --- high fever, headache and joint pains.

The deadly disease is caused by plasmodium parasite transmitted to humans through the bite of infected female anopheles mosquito, usually found in forests.

Dr Sheikh Md Abdur Razzak, chief of microbiology department at Sikder Women's Medical College in Dhaka, said, "I have evidence of thousands of blood slides which show presence of malaria parasite, amazingly most of the parasites are not readily detected under microscope."

Explaining this, he said, "The parasite in the red blood cells appears very light rose-colored, so it is not easily distinguishable. One has to carefully look for the light pink circle or often half circle-shaped parasite, but majority of malaria cases are mistaken for other diseases having almost identical symptoms."

"The problem is that since malaria is not commonly found in the city, when doctors suggest malaria test, technicians, often without appropriate knowledge, report a negative result," he pointed out.

Citing examples, the expert said, "A government employee aged over 50 had extreme pains in his limb joints for about a decade without a cure due to wrong diagnosis. Finally, we detected he had malaria."

Narrating his long suffering, the patient, Alamgir Noori, said he had given all up hopes for recovery. But now

he is alright after taking drugs for malaria.

Another microbiologist, Prof Shamir Saha of Dhaka Shishu Hospital, also admitted detecting malaria parasites in many patients. "We found 15 malaria positive cases out of 72 last month and three out of 42 in June."

Dr Bena_Zir Ahmed, a microbiologist at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said, "Studies show the mosquito that transmits malaria exists in the city but I cannot comment on finding malaria positive cases since we do not conduct the relevant test at the IEDCR."

One expert said, "It is indeed mysterious that most of the patients tested positive for malaria parasite had no record of visiting areas like the Chittagong Hill Tracts forests, where mosquitoes that transmit malaria are found."

Entomologist (scientist who studies insects) Toudid Uddin Ahmed, who carried out a study last year to find if anopheles mosquitoes exist in the capital, said, "Finding

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

BALU MURDER CASE

Prime suspect held in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police arrested a PBCP cadre and the prime suspect in Janmabhum editor Humayun Kabir Balu murder case from a tea stall in Motijheel in the capital Saturday midnight.

A team of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) and Motijheel Police Station in a combined drive arrested Khorha Liton, 30, armed cadre of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP) Janajuddha faction.

IO (investigation officer)

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Imam rapes 5-yr-old girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A religious teacher raped a five-year-old girl in a mosque in Kushtia while another girl of the same age was violated in Jhenidah in separate incidents on Sunday.

Kushtia police said religious teacher Zohurul Islam, 26, son of Sahidul Islam of Masan in Mirpur upazila, used to give Al-Quran lessons at Masan Bazaar Mosque. On

Sunday, SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

300 killed in Paraguay shopping centre fire

AFP, Asuncion

Nearly 300 people were killed and hundreds more injured when a deadly fire raced through a shopping center on the outskirts of the Paraguayan capital, police said early yesterday.

The toll of the Sunday blaze was especially high because shopping center security personnel locked the main doors to prevent customers from fleeing without first paying.

Firefighters believe the fire was ignited by a spark hitting an industrial-sized propane gas tank in the food court.

National police spokesman Santiago Velazco said early Monday that at least 296 people were killed, and more than 300 were injured.

"It is possible that there are more bodies," Velazco told AFP. "We are still removing bodies, though in a cautious, slow manner," he said, referring to fears that the whole building may collapse due to structural damage.

The blaze consumed a significant part of a supermarket within the shopping complex, which also houses offices and a parking garage.

Witnesses said that in the chaos that ensued they heard several explosions. Officials said the fire had likely been sparked by gas canisters that subsequently ignited.

Prosecutor Edgar Sanchez, in charge of investigating the blaze, told reporters that shopping center owner Juan Pio Paiva will be charged with homicide for blocking the doors. Paiva surrendered to the authorities, but denied ordering workers to close the shopping center doors.

One survivor, Rosa Resquin, said she heard someone shouting "close them, close them" and "no one gets out of here without paying."

"When they arrived, the police and firemen opened the doors, but it was already too late," she told reporters.

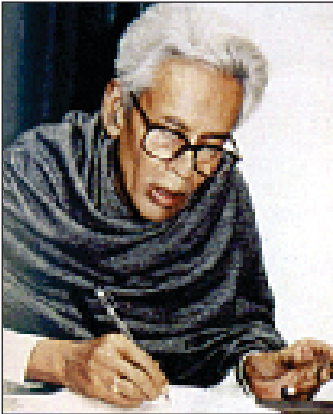
Patricia Benitez, 17, who was being treated at a hospital for second-degree burns, said, "they closed the door in our face."

"(People) broke the exit door from outside and then we were able to get out," Benitez told AFP.

"Most people died of smoke inhalation. Burns might have occurred later," said volunteer firefighters Captain Hugo Onieva. "If they had let them out it wouldn't have happened."

Volunteer firefighter spokesman Roque Gonzalez told AFP that shopping center security personnel even shot at firefighters when they attempted to force open the main door.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



Santosh Gupta in coma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted journalist and columnist Santosh Gupta is fighting for life at the intensive care unit (ICU) at BIRDEM hospital. He is now in coma.

Santosh was admitted to the hospital on Saturday after he fell ill while taking a morning walk.

He suffered from brain haemorrhage from ruptured veins. Priyatosh Gupta, younger son of Santosh, said quoting test reports.

His elder son Manoj Gupta and relatives, colleagues and admirers rushed to the hospital to see him for the last time.

He had been working with the Daily Sangbad as the senior assistant editor.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: STAR

A worker head-loads brick to repair the damaged road in the commercial district of Motijheel yesterday as receding floodwaters bared potholed roads and lanes. Floods swamped much of the city.