

Tk 1,500cr lifeline for rural infrastructure

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday directed the ministries to immediately start rehabilitation of flood-ravaged rural infrastructure with the Tk 1,500 crore in repair funds provided in the budget.

The ministries concerned have also been directed not to accept any new projects, unless they are donor-funded, beyond the 330 projects currently under the Annual Development Programme (ADP).

"A directive has been given to all ministries concerned to start off post-flood rehabilitation immediately. For our long-term rehabilitation programme, we will inform the multinational donors of the needs after we receive the assessment report," Saifur told reporters, emerging from a high-level meeting with the secretaries of the

relevant ministries at the National Economic Council conference room yesterday.

"The ongoing ADP projects and donor-funded projects will continue along with the post-flood rehabilitation programme," Saifur said.

He added the less-priority ones would remain suspended for a while and be carried over in the next fiscal year for implementation.

The finance minister also sent a strong warning to meeting participants against any pilferage in the name of post-flood rehabilitation, meeting sources said. As the planning commission vice-chairman, Saifur also asked secretaries to closely monitor the rehabilitation programme to check corruption and misuse of funds.

The Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Department (IMED) of the planning ministry has been

assigned with field visits to major post-flood rehabilitation projects to cross-check and confirm demands made in project proposals.

Ministries concerned, including communications, health, education and agriculture, have been asked to provide assessment reports of damage done by the floods.

On the basis of the assessment findings, the Planning Commission, IMED and Economic Relations Division (ERD) will jointly decide which projects are to be presented to donors, such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, for funding assistance, meeting sources said.

The secretary to industries ministry told the meeting that an additional 7,000 tonnes of fertiliser would be needed in the government inventory to meet the huge amount required to rehabilitate the agriculture sector, a

meeting source said.

The rehabilitation of the agriculture sector would be dealt a blow if the government were to follow procurement guidelines as it would take at least 41 days to purchase the fertiliser from overseas, the secretary added.

Saifur assured the secretary of steps to change the procurement guidelines at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs next week to facilitate the procurement, said meeting sources.

Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan also informed the meeting Tk 553 crore has been provided for repairs and maintenance to the Roads and Highways Department under the budget, Tk 370 crore to local government and rural development ministry, T k 2 5 0 c r o r e t o

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Tailors prepare for the reopening of their shop in Keraniganj yesterday as floodwaters run off from parts of Dhaka district that was reeling under two weeks of monsoon flooding.

PHOTO: STAR

Affected farmers to get 5kg seed, 25kg fertiliser each for free

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the agriculture ministry to provide each flood-hit marginal farmer with 5kg seed and 25kg fertiliser for free under the first phase of Agriculture Rehabilitation Programme 2004.

The prime minister directed the agriculture ministry to properly implement the programme and start the second phase soon so that the farmers can recoup their crop losses caused by the deluge.

Khaleda gave the directive when State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir apprised her at her office of the activities and progress of the programme.

Emerging from the meeting the

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WFP may call for global food aid Monday

9,617 more ill with diarrhoea

NEWS DESK

The World Food Programme (WFP) is likely to make a global appeal for food aid on Monday for flood victims ahead of the United Nations' 'flash appeal' to the international community for emergency aid to the deluge-ravaged Bangladesh.

WFP Country Representative Douglas Casson Coutts told the official news agency BSS that the preliminary assessment of food assistance was almost complete.

The WFP will use food aid to launch a major emergency operation for five million ultra-poor flood-hit people that

would be launched in the middle of this month, Coutts said.

"We are going to fill the gaps of other initiatives to feed the vulnerable people and trying to reach the succours to the maximum number of people avoiding overlapping and duplication," he said.

Coutts's statement came as the full impact of the floods that disrupted the lives of about 30 million people and released a disease epidemic began to emerge amid the desperate need of food and medicine for tens of thousands of flood victims living in temporary shelters.

DISEASES RAMPAGE

Medical teams were struggling to cope

with a "massive" outbreak of diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases.

Thousands of people, mostly children, are crowding district hospitals for treatment of diarrhoea, dysentery, intestinal infection, skin diseases and respiratory infections.

Although 3,373 mobile medical teams are working in the flood-ravaged areas with an additional 919 temporary treatment centres, reports from different districts say they were not enough and it is often difficult to reach medical camps.

"It is worse than we thought," said a man taking his sick son to a

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CAUGHT IN ARMS TRAINING

Only 6 of 33 Islamic militants charged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Barguna police on Wednesday submitted charge sheet against only six of the 33 alleged Islamic militants who were arrested while taking arms training on June 30, 2004 in Barguna Sadar upazila.

The rest 27 were acquitted of the charges.

Barguna police a week after the arrests filed an attempt to murder and extortion case against those 33 people.

Court sources said Investigation Officer (IO) of the case Md Shahidul Islam, sub inspector of Barguna Sadar Police Station, submitted the charge sheet.

He named Asadul Islam, Al Amin, Mustafa Hasan, Masum Billah, Abdur Rahman and Tanvir Ahmed as accused under sections 448, 342, 379 and 301 of CrPC.

He also prayed for acquitting another 27 of the charges as no

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CAMEL JOCKEY

3 get life for trafficking children

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Two tribunals in Dhaka yesterday sentenced three people to life for trafficking children to Dubai.

Judge Sarker Abul Mansur Ahmed of the Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression-3 sentenced a 55-year-old man to life in jail for trafficking two children and a woman on August 17, 1996.

The convict, Mohammad Shahabuddin was present when the judge read out the verdict at a jam-packed courtroom.

Saleha Khatun, 30, Shaon, 6 and Sajib, 5 were the people who were trafficked.

The tribunal, however, acquitted two other women, Nurjahan Begum and Bhanu alias Nur Bhanu, as the charges brought against them were not proved.

Earlier, the prosecution and

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BDR, BSF agree on quiet border

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and India have agreed to take effective measures to defuse border tension and stop all kinds of cross-border crimes.

The consensus came from a four-day annual border conference between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force (BSF) that ended at BDR sector headquarters in Comilla yesterday.

Other issues like killing of innocent and unarmed Bangladeshis by the BSF, intrusion of Indian citizens into Bangladesh, control over arms and drug smuggling and security issues came up at the conference for discussion.

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City lowlanders miss trawlers of survival

BISHAWJIT DAS

Thousands of desperate people in small boats set off for relief trawlers once they come in sight in the hope of finding something for their survival in the lowlands of Dhaka after weeks of devastating monsoon flooding.

"Many of them get scant relief, some return to their submerged houses empty-handed," said a local resident.

"Both my hands are aching for paddling throughout the day for a pack of chira (beaten rice) for my 12-member family," said Hasina.

"Come and see what floodwaters have caused to my house," she said, adding, "Raging floods have washed away half of my house. Although the water is receding, I still live in waist-level water."

Most people in the lowlands of Khilgaon, Badda and Demra are still

reeling from hunger, waterborne diseases and lack of shelter and many of them blamed inadequate relief and mismanagement in the distribution of whatever relief is available for their miseries.

Although floodwaters have receded in most places in Dhaka, the areas around Hatijheel Khal and the Balu river are still under 5 feet to 20 feet water. Local residents think the floodwaters will take another 20 days to dwindle from the areas.

Abdul Latif, a fish trader at Nasirabad in Khilgaon, said about 2 feet of floodwaters subsided from his house in the last week, but it would take almost a month to get his homestead dry.

People in Aftabnagar, Indiliah, Nasirabad, Trimohini, Baghpara and Ghurnagarbagh villages around Hatirheel Khal and the Balu said a

large number of relief trawlers sailed past them, without stopping at their flood-hit villages.

"We call out for help, but our words fall to their deaf ears," said Solema, a resident of Aftabnagar, adding, "We got our last relief supplies seven days ago."

Like Solema, about a hundred women and children milling around on river banks for relief, asked this correspondent to inform the local administration of their woes.

Seventy-year-old Romena took refuge in Aftabnagar a couple of months ago after the fierce-flowing Meghna washed away her house.

"Please, give me a packet of relief material otherwise I'll starve to death," she told this correspondent mistaking him for a relief worker.

People of Indiliah, without relief since Friday, are planning to block

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People waded through swirling floodwaters that recede from lowing-lying Rajakhali in Demra into the surrounding Balu river yesterday after the deluge disrupted the lives of about 30 million and released a disease epidemic.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Woman commits 'suicide', man stabbed dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A housewife allegedly committed suicide at Ramna while unknown assailants stabbed dead a youth at Nakhalpara yesterday.

Unhappy conjugal life and torture by her husband Noki Hasan Jitu led to the death of 30-year-old housewife Roksana Akhter Mitu, alleged domestic helps.

The couple was staying in a rented house near Mouchak Market for the last 10 days.

"They quarrelled for a long time since 11:00pm last night (Wednesday) and at one point he (Jitu) beat her up," police quoted Rasheda, one

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US helicopter shot down in Iraq

GI, 8 killed in fighting, 9 others in suicide bombing

AFP, Najaf

Eight people were killed and a US helicopter was shot down as US troops battled Shia Muslim militiamen in Iraq Thursday, while a suicide bombing and shoot-out outside a police station left another nine people dead.

US helicopters circled above Najaf cemetery, while heavy gunfire and mortar rounds boomed across the Shia

holy city.

A US soldier was killed Thursday around Iraq's central holy city of Najaf, where fierce fighting pitted US troops against Shia Muslim militiamen, the US military said.

The soldier was killed and five others wounded when their convoy came under rocket-propelled grenade attack and gunfire near Najaf, said a statement.

The clashes continued into the late

afternoon after a brief lull following the downing of a helicopter attached to the 11th Marine Expeditionary unit.

"A UH-1 marine helicopter was shot down at about 11:45 am (0745 GMT)," a military spokesman said. The two crew members were recovered alive, although the extent of their injuries was not immediately known, he added.

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia distributes clothes among flood victims in Manikganj, one of the 45 districts ravaged by the deluge.

PHOTO: PID

