

ADB sets condition

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The ACC sits today to take a decision on the ADB proposal. "We have received a copy of ADB's proposal today and will sit tomorrow to take a decision," ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

A source in the ACC said the ADB is imposing conditions on the commission by proposing the appointment of four consultants despite ACC's request for two.

He said the government will take the final decision on ADB's proposal.

Shifting from the commission's previous stand against appointment of ADB consultants, the ACC chairman sent a letter to ADB's Bangladesh resident mission on April 30, requesting for appointment of two consultants.

He was learnt to have made the move without discussing the matter with the two commissioners. Sources said the chairman briefed commissioner Prof Maniuzzaman Miah about the matter after sending the letter.

The chairman and two ACC commissioners, during a meeting with cabinet secretary Dr Saadat Hussain on January 8, opposed the ADB proposal for assistance.

The commission did not make positive response when officer-in-charge of ADB's Bangladesh resident mission Hua Du met the ACC top officials on January 11.

Commissioner Miah openly opposed the idea of appointing ADB consultants and said: "I do not think hiring foreign consultants at this moment is necessary."

But Justice Sultan later asked for immediate appointment of a change management consultant/advisor and an organisation development consultant for the commission.

The management consultant would provide professional advice and technical support on day-to-day and operational matters of the ACC and help develop short, medium and long term actions and strategic plan for the anticorruption watchdog.

His tasks also include assisting and maintaining liaison with the government and taking a lead role in the screening of former staff of Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac).

The other consultant's task mentioned by the ACC chairman is preparing job analysis of the approved ACC organogram and assisting the management consultant.

He also mentioned in the letter the necessity of logistic support for the commission.

In reply, ADB named four consultants -- Mujibul Huq (Team Leader/Change Management Advisor-Domestic), Chua Cher Yak (Organisation Development Consultant-International), Sakhawat Hussain (Organisation Development Consultant-Domestic) and Abdul Matin (Legal Trainer and Capacity Building Consultant-Domestic).

In the aide-memoire, the ADB said the scope of its assistance in the short run would focus on the development of legal framework for ACC operationalisation, criteria and procedures for screening of Bac staff and its

Aussie firm hired

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fight Niko at any international court, he added.

ENERGY ADVISER'S WARNING TO NIKO

Talking to the press at his Board of Investment (BoI) office, Mahmudur Rahman yesterday said the government expects Niko to begin paying compensation for the gas loss from the first week of the next month.

"We will start formal compensation talks with the Canadian company after receiving the preliminary loss assessment reports by the investigation teams. We will get it by the end of this month," Rahman, the newly appointed adviser to the energy ministry, told The Daily Star.

The ministry has formed two committees to assess the gas loss and environmental damage caused by the two rounds of blowout on January 7 and June 24 in Tengratila gas field.

However, he ruled out the cancellation of Niko's contract. "If we cancel the contract, who will control the fire of the well? Presently, it's most important that Niko starts drilling the relief well as a remedial measure for the blowout," he explained.

NIKO HIRES DRILLING FIRM FOR RELIEF WELL

Niko Resources (Bangladesh) Ltd President Qasim Sharif in a press release yesterday said the company has begun mobilisation of a drilling rig from Moulvibazar gas field of Unocal. The rig owned by Century will be directly transported by a barge to the Tengratila drilling site.

"We have also been able to recover a significant amount of the major equipment we mobilised for the first relief well. The equipment has been shifted to a safe location. We will be able to use the equipment for the blowout control operation after we drill the second relief well," he said.

"We have submitted our proposal to Bapex, Petrobangla and the government on drilling the second relief well and control the blowout in the Chhatak [Tengratila] gas field. The drilling operation will commence after we receive the approval," Sharif said.

He said Niko has paid Tk 1.91 crore as assistance to the affected villagers living in the vicinity of Chhatak gas field. "In addition, we are continuing to pay Tk 8 lakh a month to the affected villagers of the area," he added.

DEMANDS, PROTESTS

organogram.

The ADB informed the ACC about the possibility of a follow-up ADB governance technical assistance in 2006, subject to progress under the current technical assistance.

The follow-up assistance for next year may accommodate training of the ACC officials and procurement of some equipment for the commission.

The ADB also informed the ACC about the possibility of a future governance project in 2007 for support of further facilities requested by ACC Chairman in his April 30 letter.

The ADB also informed the commission about the proposed terms of reference (ToR) of the consultants and their detailed job description.

According to the ToR, one of the consultants will review the ACC Act to see if there are any inadequacies or scope for further development of the act to strengthen ACC's independence and capacity in anticorruption matters.

The commission, meanwhile, has completed first phase screening of Bac staff and has already absorbed 20 out of 67 ex-Bac anti-corruption officers and 30 out of 116 Bac inspectors.

The ACC also has completed 70 percent work on the formation of the organogram. Sources said if the commission takes ADB assistance now, it will make further delay in finalising the organogram.

Indefinite strike

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attacking students on the campus on May 28, 29 and 31, action against Officer-in-Charge of Ramna Police Station Mahbubur Rahman, compensation for the injured students during the campus violence, peaceful co-existence of the leaders and supporters of different organisations on the campus and at the dormitories, and resignation of DU vice-chancellor and proctor for their "failure to ensure security of the students".

Meanwhile, BCL President Liaquat Sikder said they will not withdraw the strike until the authorities punish the real culprits responsible for the campus violence.

He termed forming the probe body 'an eyewash' and demanded impartial investigation into the campus violence.

The BCL yesterday took out a procession and held a rally on the campus.

No classes were held at the university in the last two days and administrative works were partially done. The DU authorities had earlier postponed all the examinations scheduled for July 2 and 3.

Academic activities at the DU were scheduled to resume on July 1 after a month-long summer vacation.

Meanwhile, JCD Acting President Sultan Salauddin Tuku and General Secretary Shaiful Bari Babu and DU Unit President Hasan Mamun and General Secretary Saiful Islam Firoz in a statement said the strike has been called to create backlog at DU and destroy congenial atmosphere on the campus.

Federer

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and Pete Sampras as the only players since World War II to win three-in-a-row at the All England Club.

It was a repeat of last year's final and once again Roddick's muscular might was no match for the sublime all-court skills of the world's top player. Twelve months ago it was all over in four sets; on Sunday it needed only three.

The win was Federer's 36th in a row on grass, five short of Bjorn Borg's record of 41, and it left Roddick still seeking a second Grand Slam win to go with the 2003 US Open.

The 23-year-old Federer dropped just one set on the way to his third Wimbledon final and he peaked in the semifinals where he saw off the challenge of old rival Lleyton Hewitt in straight sets.

Roddick, a year younger, had a far more eventful road to the title match enduring two tough five-setters, the worst of the rain delays, and a semi-final against Swede Thomas Johansson that robbed him of a day's rest.

Judiciary suffers

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of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) at its auditorium in the city.

"What is left if the judiciary itself becomes corrupt?" Moudud questioned, adding that only the judiciary reform is not enough, rather many other related factors also have to be improved.

The minister said professions of law and accounting are different from others as these professions are a combination of knowledge, legal obligation, social evaluation and ethical aspects.

He said the tax payment of a company or an institution depends on the financial statements of that organisation prepared by the public accountants. Urging the public accountants not to compromise with morality, he said, "You have to be honest, responsible and liable in your profession. And I believe that money is not everything in life."

Addressing the function, ICAB President Sheikh A Hafiz said a public accountant is responsible for issuing an independent opinion on a set of financial statements without being biased.

He alleged that some small accounting firms are not doing business in proper way and may create a threat to the whole profession.

MA Baree, former ICAB president, presented the keynote paper at the seminar while former deputy prime minister and ex-president of ICAB Jamal Uddin Ahmed conducted the session.

Traders

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sections take bribes for releasing them from the Customs House.

Of the imported goods, the electronic gadgets are the costliest in terms of bribe as Tk 3,000 is spent for per tonne electronic goods, the report revealed.

On the other hand, vegetables are the most expensive among the export goods as per tonne vegetable needs Tk 1,700 as bribe.

Of the money needed to release containers from the port, 47 percent is its real value while the rest 53 percent is spent on bribes.

The other problems include port officials' tendency to take excessive bribe, procedural complications, age-old rules, monopoly domination of the operators and pilots, and excess labour unions, the report noted.

The report recommended a host of suggestions to resolve the problems. They are: giving Stevedoring Company the authority to appoint workers, engaging private sector for equipment handling, taking statements of assets of the employees and officials, and entrusting the port authorities with full power to solve the problems.

The TIB report was made on the basis of newspaper reports, direct observation and through the process of asking specific questions to the people concerned.

No int'l flight

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weather. The jet fuel loaded in the aircraft has been taken away Sunday.

Bangladesh Biman sources said that Peter Tyrer, a representative of Lloyd David Insurance Company, a British company with which the aircraft was insured, reached Dhaka from Singapore on Saturday night.

Tyrer visited the spot yesterday morning.

Sources said that the DC-10 aircraft would be declared write-off officially if the representative of the insurance company gives a 'green signal'. In that case, it will be much easier to carry out the salvage operation, cutting the aircraft into pieces.

"Peter would sit with the Biman officials today and submit his report after returning to Singapore," said a Biman official.

Meanwhile, the president of Bangladesh Airlines Pilot Association (Bapa) Flight Captain Nasim dismissed the rumour that the pilot and co-pilot of the flight were on drugs.

People with no technical expertise in this field should not make any comments regarding the incident, he said in a statement yesterday. The investigation committee should not be biased with such information and the pilots should be given a fair chance to defend themselves, he added.

M Habibullah Khan, the chief of the probe body, said they are continuing the investigations, but he declined to elaborate on their findings.

Vast swath of land

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Since the explosion, villagers in the area have been spending sleepless nights as the tremor caused by the blast continued to shake the ground. Signs of damage are everywhere. Buildings and fields near the wellhead are cracked and some of the tin-roof houses tilted.

"No-one can sleep in the night within a radius of one kilometre, as the shaking of ground is felt more during the night," says Rabiul Alam of Tengratila village.

Rabiul, who lives roughly half a kilometre away from the burning well, claims at least 90,000 fishes in his fisheries died following the second Niko Resources disaster. Only five months ago, on January 7, a severe blowout almost destroyed the ill-fated gas field.

"I constructed a building spending 16 lakh taka just a few months ago. But the blast and relentless vibration have made large cracks at many places of the house," says Rabiul.

The impact of the blast is felt even at Sharipur, a village two and a half kilometres away from the gas field in Doarabazar upazila, where water is bubbling. Bubbles of gas are also seen in the nearby Sumra River.

Villagers say flocks of birds that used to rest here now no longer come this way. The repeated blowouts threaten the fishes with extinction, for whom this remote lowland dominated by haors (lakes) and marshes has been a safe haven for long.

"Our life has become miserable due to the repeated blowouts," says Tengratila Union Parishad Member Abdur Rahman, adding, "we don't want to see any more fire in the future."

According to Abdur Rahman, the gas exploration activities of Niko Resources (Bangladesh) Ltd have not brought any benefit for the locals.

"Rather, we are always in panic of a fresh explosion and fire," he says, adding, "these accidents have forced our boys and girls to stop going to school for many days."

The day before yesterday, the height of the flame lessened a bit but its girth spread further to all the nearby wells. The well that exploded in January was also burning. A nearby pond was boiling.

Shahara Khatun says all the children of her family are suffering from various diseases like fever, headache and heat stroke. Her daughter Zarina Khatun, a student of Class 5C, became so frightened seeing the furious fire that she has been trembling all the time.

Shahara shifted her family to a nearby village after the accident. Even there, Zarina had been feverish for many days.

No Niko official was available for comment on Saturday. However,

Comes waterlogging

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and Cooperatives Ziaul Haq Zia yesterday formed a seven-member committee in the face of water logging in vast city areas due to incessant rainfall since Saturday night.

The committee headed by Dhaka City Corporation chief engineer has been asked to submit its report within a week.

The committee will identify the waterlogged areas in the capital and causes of water logging," the minister told The Daily Star after the meeting held at the Secretariat that also went under water.

"We will sit again after getting the committee report," he said.

The meeting noted that narrowing down of three drains through Kamalapur area that carry water from the Secretariat and Motijheel commercial areas is the cause of water logging in those areas, the state minister said, adding, "We asked the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to widen the drains."

High officials of the Dhaka Wasa, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Water Development Board and Rajuk were present at the meeting.

Last year, when most of the city went under water for several days, the government formed an inter-ministerial committee headed by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abul Mannan Bhuiyan.

Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, Forest and Environment Minister Tariqul Islam, Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, State Minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Quamrul Islam, State Minister for Home Luffozaman Babar, State Minister for

Ashraf, chief security official of Tengratila gas field, claims Niko is trying to arrest the fire. "But it's not easy to douse such a fierce fire. It would require digging another relief well beside the burning one."

Ashraf says company officials are going to hire rigs for drilling the relief well. However, he does not know how many days would be required to extinguish the blaze.

According to him, a total of 80 families living in the nearby areas were evacuated to other places after the blowout.

He also says a non-governmental organisation is assessing the environmental damage of the fire and the actual picture would be known after the study is complete.

Rab crossfire

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yesterday said while unveiling the cover of 'Rab: Santrash Nirmla Na Rashtr Santrash (Curbing terrorism or State-run terrorism) at the VIP lounge of National Press Club.

The book published by Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK) is mainly a compilation of essays by different persons expressing concern over 'extrajudicial killings by Rab'.

It also contains investigative reports, newspaper-clippings, and statistics for the number of victims, and relevant laws and amendments.

Meanwhile, some 100 people from different districts gathered in front of the press club yesterday. They demonstrated in favour of Rab and its activities while the publication ceremony was going on inside the press club.

The demonstrators entered the club as well, and spoke at the programme glorifying the Rab activities. They termed the incidents of 'crossfire' self-defence.

Claiming themselves to be victims of crime, they blamed the human rights organisations for raising voice against the crime-busting force.

ASK Executive Director Sultana Kamal described the deaths in 'crossfire' as murders.

"We can cite names of at least seven people, who we found by investigation that were not killed in crossfire, rather were murdered by Rab," Sultana Kamal told reporters.

Advocate Ruhul Kuddus Babu said there are loopholes in the act under which Rab was formed and operates. Abdul Hakim, the father of Sumon [of Goran], who was killed allegedly by Rab, spoke at the programme. He narrated the tragic end of his son and demanded punishment of the killers.

Monir Ahmed Majumder, father of Sumon Ahmed Majumdar of Tongi, was also present. Sumon, who was a key witness to the murder of Ahsanullah Master MP, died at a hospital allegedly after torture in Rab custody.

Land Abdus Sattar and lawmakers of city constituencies were members of the inter-ministerial committee.

On August 7, 2004, the committee meeting decided to demolish illegal structures from 26 canals and rivers in and around the capital for smooth functioning of the drainage system, but little has been done so far.

The meeting formed an expert committee to prepare plans for recovering encroached water bodies in and around the city.

The expert committee submitted its report with 26-point recommendations to resolve water logging problem of Dhaka city that emphasised demolishing illegal structures from the city canals.

A land ministry report in October last year also identified illegal encroachment of city canals as responsible for water logging and warned that the situation would deteriorate if such practices is not stopped.

Of the 35 canals, only 14 could carry away water while illegal structures like houses and roads grabbed rest of the canals halting flow of water, the report said.

"United efforts of Dhaka City Corporation, Rajuk, Dhaka Wasa and Dhaka district administration are necessary to make the canals live by demolishing the illegal structures," said the report submitted to a parliamentary body.

But the recommendations are still unmet other than Dhaka Wasa's scanty efforts to demolish a few illegal structures on the canals.

DND damned

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trapped by a fresh waterlogging after Saturday's heavy overnight downpour that continued yesterday, though intermittently.

Many people have already left their homes and took shelter in their relatives' houses as the vast DND area has gone under knee to waist-deep water.

The residents in the waterlogged area are suffering from scarcity of pure drinking water. Gas and electricity crises have added to their miseries.

In the Dhaka portion of the DND embankment area, the water supply line developed leakage, locals alleged. They complained of dirty water with bad smell, possibly emanating from the sewerage line attached to the waterline.

"I have sent my wife and children to a relative's house outside the DND area as my house is now in waist-deep water," said Shamsul Alam, a resident of Sastapur area.

"When I woke up yesterday morning, I found my house reeling under knee-deep water. In many houses in the DND area, gas burners have gone under water," said Jamil Khanndok, another resident of Sastapur.

Many industrial units located inside the DND embankment area have suspended their operations due to waterlogging. Most of the educational institutions were also closed yesterday as teachers and students were affected.

Belayet Hossain, sub-assistant engineer at Shimiral pump house of Siddhirganj, said the height of water is

HC stays

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advisor to the caretaker government and National Board of Revenue (NBR) Chairman Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury and ordered the government not to arrest or harass him during this period.

A High Court division bench passed the order after Mueyed moved a writ petition, challenging the validity of incorporating his name in the charge sheets of the cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) on February 2, 2002 had filed a case with the Tongi and Tejgaon police stations accusing Akiz Group of Industries Ltd of dodging taxes of Tk 536 crore and Tk 32 crore.

In his writ petition, Mueyed also challenged the validity of an ACC gazette notification forming a fact-finding committee. In the petition, he said as per the rules, the ACC cannot form a committee with the officials of now-abolished Bac.

Besides staying the proceedings of the cases, the High Court bench also issued a rule upon the government and the ACC to show cause in two weeks why the charge sheets and the ACC gazette should not be declared illegal.

The respondents are the ACC chairman, cabinet secretary, principal secretary to the prime minister and the investigation officer (IO) of the cases.

In the gazette notification, the ACC had formed a committee comprising 10 Bac staff to probe the corruption cases on March 6 this year and appointed one of the committee members as the IO of the cases.

The IO submitted two supplementary charge sheets to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on June 21, incorporating the name of Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury who is currently serving as the executive director of Brac.

The IO said in the charge-sheets that Tk 568 crore tax was not recovered from the Akiz Group since Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury as the NBR chairman had not directed the authorities concerned to file cases against the company.

Barnister Omar Sadat moved for the petitioner.

TCB reports

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The TCB report also showed that prices of some essentials have gone up substantially in last one month alone. According to the report, prices of fine rice increased by 6.82 percent, lentil 7.95 percent, onion 14.28 percent, garlic 13.1 percent and broiler 14.81 percent in during the last month.

The TCB prepared the report by comparing yesterday's essentials' prices with those of a week, a month and a year ago.

Advisor to the commerce ministry Md Barkat Ullah Bulu, Chairman of the National Board of Revenue Khairuzzaman Chowdhury, secretaries of the commerce, food and agriculture ministries, representatives from the prime minister's office, finance, home and communications ministries, and law enforcing agencies attended the meeting.

"Rice supply in the market is not at the expected level despite a bumper harvest," Altaf told newsmen after the meeting at the ministry's conference room.

The meeting blamed hoarding by millers for the rice price hike.

The farmers also stocked up rice apprehending floods in the coming weeks, he said.

Transport cost hike because of fuel price increase also resulted in the market heat up, the meeting observed, and extortion and prolonged rain have only aggravated the situation.

The meeting proposed open market sale of rice to ease prices and duty cut on some essential items such as soybean oil, sugar and gram well ahead of Ramadan to avoid an 'embarrassing' situation.

A national taskforce on essential price will sit on July 6 to further review the price situation.

Tata investment

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coal field on the basis of its "set blocks awarding system".

All the issues will be finalised after a viability study on the Ruppur site for Tata investment.

The government and the Tata Group on May 9 agreed to kick off formal negotiations on May 25 and wind it up by August 31 to clear the way for signing the investment contract before November 30. Tata on April 20 formally submitted a \$2.5 billion investment proposal for setting up a 1000 MW power station, a steel plant with an annual production capacity of 420,000 tons and a 1-million-ton fertiliser unit.

Injured woman

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died at 9:25am, DMCH sources said.

Earlier on June 13, her daughter Rowshan Ara died from burns she suffered in the plane crash at the same hospital.

An F-7 MB fighter of Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) had nosedived into their house in Uttara in the capital. Rowshan accompanied by her mother was feeding her 18-month-old daughter Albina.

The accident left four others injured, but the pilot, Ahsanul Kabir, cheated death by bailing out of the aircraft.

Rowshan's husband Al Amin received Lily's body in presence of BAF officials from the DMCH yesterday. Morgue sources said they were not allowed to perform her autopsy.

Govt to decide

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meeting and hopefully, a decision will be taken," Ziaul Haque Zia, state minister for local government rural development (LGRD) and co-operatives told The Daily Star yesterday.

The BNP-led coalition government since assuming office in 2001 has declared on several occasions to hold the UP elections, but there has not been any progress to this end as yet.

Political observers believe if the government declares the UP elections schedule, local leaders and grass roots workers of the opposition parties will busy themselves preparing for the polls, thus undermining the main opposition's efforts to rev up the anti government movement.

The state minister however dismissed such allegations. He said, "It is not true. The government has made the move for the polls in line with the High Court directives."

Since the introduction of the upazila system, two elections have been held, one in 1985 and the other one in 1990. Successive governments did not discharge the responsibility to hold the elections, instead they practised spin control on the issue.

Former military ruler HM Ershad had introduced upazila system. But the previous government of Khaleda Zia had cancelled the system after coming to power in 1991.

Awami League (AL) government

revived the system in 1997, a year after it took the office. It, however, did not hold elections to the local government bodies.

The AL government had asked the EC to hold upazila elections in 2000 amidst an anti-government movement by the then BNP-led opposition. The EC had started preparing for the polls in line with the government directive. But in the end, no schedule was declared and no election held.

The present ruling alliance immediately after the onset of its rule had asked the EC to hold upazila elections. The alliance leaders also said that it would give the power to declare election schedule back to the EC by amending the existing law.

Following the assurances, the EC had announced a date to declare the upazila election schedule. But later as the government deviated from its words, the EC could not declare the schedule.

The BNP-led government then formed a cabinet committee on the upazila system, but senior ministers split over reintroducing the system. The differences over the issue have yet to be settled.

The BNP Standing Committee at a meeting in November last year informally agreed to hold the upazila elections.

City reels under rainwater

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hours on end.

"I got on a Farmgate-bound bus from Jatrahari at 7:30 in the morning and reached Kanwan Bazar well beyond 11:00am, as the bus got stuck in knee-deep water at Motijheel," said Reaz Hossain, an office-goer.

"It took me more than three hours to reach the judge's court at Sadarghat from Mirpur 10, as the road from Mirpur to Sheorapara went under water, prompting buses to remain off," Chaitanya Basak, an advocate, told The Daily Star.

Water ran into exhaust pipes of motorised vehicles, causing them to break down and induce traffic snarl-ups on the main streets. Rickshaws were in great demand among the office goers, although the number of the non-motorised vehicles was few.

It has been drizzling for the last three days due to active monsoon, but heavy rains poured down the capital since early yesterday and continued until 1:00pm.

The meteorology department recorded 101 millimetres (mm) of rain in the 24 hours until 6:00am and 59 mm during 6:00am to 12:00pm in Dhaka yesterday.