

25 killed as storm

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and 39 Navy staff at Mongla.

The disaster occurred as a sudden storm under the influence of a depression lashed at the coastal belt from 7:30pm till 9:00pm at a speed of 100 to 130 kilometres per hour and generated waves as high as 40 feet.

Meanwhile, the normal life in the capital was also hampered due to the continuous drizzle. A few number of people were seen in the streets while commuters suffered as the rickshaw-pullers and drivers of CNG three-wheelers and cabs hiked up the fares.

A special met office bulletin said the well marked low in the Bay is likely to intensify further and move in a north-westerly direction. All fishing boats and trawlers over the North Bay have been advised to remain close to the coast and proceed with caution till further notice.

Our Cox's Bazar correspondent reports: About 600 fishermen with 50 fishing boats from Cox's Bazar remained missing for two days as the sea turned rough due to a depression in the Bay.

Mojibur Rahman, president of Fishing Boats Owners' Association of Cox's Bazar, told The Daily Star that the missing boats went out to the sea on Tuesday. "We are anxious for their safe return," he added.

Abdul Hamid, owner of one of the lost trawlers, said only four of the 11 men on his boat had made it back home yesterday.

A rescue official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he was hopeful that many of the missing were rescued by other boats or managed to survive by swimming to the small islands that dot the coast.

Mizanur Rahman managed to swim ashore at Cox's Bazar beach yesterday after his boat sank. "Our boat was being tossed by high waves and it suddenly went down," Mizan told the Associated Press from his hospital bed. "Only four of us managed to swim ashore."

Meanwhile, Water Development Board sources said about two kilometres of flood control embankment in Maheshkhali Island was washed away by unusual high tides in the last two days.

NAVAL COMMANDER KILLED

Our Khulna correspondent reports: A naval officer was killed when a patrol boat of the Bangladesh Navy ran aground at Akram Point in the Bay of Bengal due to Tuesday's violent storm in the southern bay.

The body of Lt Commander Feroz Kabir, one of the captains of the BN Shahid Farid, was recovered yesterday noon from the spot by the naval

rescue forces. Thirty-nine other crews of the ship were also rescued during the operation aided by a Bangladesh Army helicopter.

According to Bagerhat district administration sources, the vessel was carried away by strong gales and fierce currents when the sudden storm hit the coastal belts of the Sundarbans.

Over 500 fishermen still remained missing as the storm left at least 200 fishing trawlers capsized in the Bay of Bengal along the Sundarbans. Search is on to rescue the ill-fated.

Hundreds of people of the coastal belt, left homeless due to the storm, have taken refuge at the Dublarchar cyclone shelter.

Our Chittagong office reports: Twenty-five fishermen narrowly escaped death in the deep sea on Tuesday evening when a private fishing vessel rescued them after their boat sank due to the storm, some 200 kilometres off Chittagong city.

The rescued feared death of many fishermen as nearly 36 engine boats were in the rough sea at that time. Captain Abu Taher of Hart Ford-2, which rescued the survivors, however said they did not get any warning from the met office although the sea was rough.

According to the boat owners' association of the district, the boat carrying the fishermen from Chakoria and Banskhali capsized in the Bay during the violent storm.

Our Patuakhali correspondent reports: Bodies of five fishermen were recovered in Kuakata coast areas yesterday while at least 1,000 fishermen aboard over 100 fishing trawlers remained missing in the Bay in the last two days. Abdus Salam, president of trawler owners association of Mohipur, confirmed the news.

The Patuakhali district administration, however, in a fax message sent to the higher authorities mentioned that 470 fishermen with 37 trawlers were missing in the Bay.

Citizens' body

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Ferdous spoke during the programme.

The speakers said power outages in Narayanganj worsened recently. Household water supplies, production in the industries and students' studies -- everything dependent on electricity is immensely affected due to the outage.

DESA authorities assured the committee of resolving the situation soon.

'Unhappy' AL

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of speakers at the rally. They also hinted that they might not take to the streets in today's countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal.

"Though we always work so hard for our party, we are being deprived compared to those who do not at all work for the party," a senior AL leader said, preferring not to be named.

In reply to a question, he said why they would take to the streets in blockade programme and hartal as they have been neglected by the party repeatedly. They had to work hard to organise the grand rally but they could not address it, he regretted.

The opposition combine enforces a countrywide 6:00am to 6:00pm hartal today following its ix-hour road-rail-waterway blockade programme from 6:00am yesterday to press home its demand for reforms in the caretaker government and Election Commission (EC).

Many of the senior AL leaders including presidium members Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak and Tofail Ahmed could not address Monday's grand rally.

AL sources said influential party leaders Amu, Razzak, Tofail and Jalil worked hard for several days for organising the massive rally.

But many of the junior and mid-level leaders of the AL and a number of leaders of AL allies including Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), 11-Party and National Awami Party delivered speeches at the rally.

Outlaw

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Following his confessional statement, a CID team took Sahabul along to Bhogalbagdi in Alamdanga upazila to arrest his accomplices and recover hidden firearms.

When the team reached Saheb Nagar at around 4:00am, the PBCP men started firing on the police, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate.

Sahabul was caught in 'crossfire' and died on the spot while trying to escape police custody, claimed police.

Police recovered a firearm and 3 bullets from the spot.

Chaudanga police said Sahabul was accused in ten cases filed with different police stations of the district including six murder cases.

Jamaat sits Oct 8

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exploratory mission will also be on the agenda.

For over a month, BNP and its key ally Jamaat have been haggling over quite a few issues, sources said.

The chronicle started with BNP's invitation to the deposed military ruler Ershad to the ruling alliance, and on August 23 key leaders of Jamaat met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to express their dissatisfaction regarding the possible entry of Ershad into the alliance.

Jamaat leaders stressed that they have the strength to win the election if a few loopholes existing in the alliance could be amended, and decided to announce their official stand after the majlis-e-shura meeting.

In the mean time, JP Chairman Ershad said he had no discussion about joining the ruling alliance with Jamaat Secretary al Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujaheed during their stay in Saudi Arabia. Rumours were rife that they talked about seat sharing in the parliament. The JP chairman came back home on September 3 and the Jamaat secretary came back on September 10.

Recently, the proposal of PM for a secretary level dialogue between AL and BNP inked Jamaat leaders and they observed that other components of the ruling alliance must be invited to the table.

Besides, PM's practice of announcing election candidates in rallies across the county have started a rift between the two ruling parties, sources said.

The US-based NDI and EU exploratory mission met Jamaat and discussed various issues including the possibility of holding an election and possible violence preceding, during and after the election, citing the incidents of torture on minorities following the election victory of the four-party alliance in 2001.

All these issues will dominate the coming meeting of majlis-e-shura, according to the sources.

Oriental Bank

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and took away money violating banking rules and regulations.

"At least five high officials of Oriental Bank have been sacked for involvement in the crime," one source said.

Salman Karim, a member of the dissolved board, placed the three-year plan outlining ways to restructure the bank if the former board gets back.

The proposal outlines that the board will issue rights share of Tk 100 crore. It also seeks that the central bank exempt Oriental Bank from maintaining cash reserve ratio (CRR) and statutory liquidity requirement (SLR) for three years more.

The dissolved board also sought Tk 200 crore refinance facility from the BB for another three years.

But officials at Oriental Bank expressed doubts over the dissolved board's new plan and said the situation will worsen if they get back the bank. "The board members who had earlier misappropriated huge money from the bank cannot save it," said one official.

In June this year, the BB dissolved the board for its inefficiency in operating the bank, and in the interest of depositors.

Dhaka blockaded

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near Tongi for about two hours from 8:00am.

They also vandalised a bus and two CNG autorickshaws near the Tongi rail gate.

AL and its allies brought out processions and held rallies at different parts in the capital during the blockade. Two crackers went off inside an AL rally near the Khilgaon flyover. Demonstrators damaged a taxicab at Malibagh and a double decker bus at Gabtoli.

At least 32 people, including a few policemen and journalists, were injured, in clashes between the activists of AL and ruling BNP at Koddarmoth on the Dhaka-Bogra highway in Sirajganj district, our Sirajganj correspondent reports.

Five trucks, a three-wheeler and two shops were also damaged during the clashes.

Of the injured, 17 were admitted to different clinics in the town. The condition of Jubo League Secretary Abdul Hakim, Abu Bakkar, Yusub Ali, Shipon, BNP activist Firoj and Rafik is stated to be critical.

The clash erupted at 9:00am, when activists of both the AL and BNP tried to bring out separate processions defying police obstruction at Koddarmoth.

Police charged batons and lobbed teargas shells to bring the situation under control.

At least 10 AL activists were injured, one of them critically, when police charged baton and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the opposition workers as they were marching streets near Rupshi bus stand under Rupganj upazila in Narayanganj.

The opposition workers blocked the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway with burning tires. Police obstructed a procession of the opposition workers when it was

marching towards Kanchpur Bridge at around 11:00am.

Angry picketers ransacked a car of Channel 1.

Later police conducted a massive hunt in the adjacent areas and arrested 10 AL workers.

The opposition workers brought out a procession and held rally on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Sonargaon in Narayanganj. They also damaged five vehicles, our Narayanganj correspondent reports.

Several hundred trucks and other motorised vehicles got stuck on both sides of the road due to the road blockade at Bhuiyanti Bazar in Raiganj upazila of the district.

The 14-party opposition combine observed blockade programmes for only two hours from 10:00am to 12:00pm in the port city, reports our Chittagong correspondent.

Several hundred opposition activists led by Chittagong Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and engineer Mosharraf Hossain gathered at Olonkar Intersection and AK Khan Gate and blocked the highway and railway.

The opposition workers put blockade at 18 points in Khulna city and halted a Benapole-bound train from 8:00am to 12:00noon. They also blockaded the Rupsa ferry ghat, reports our staff correspondent from Khulna.

Our Rajshahi University correspondent adds: Angry opposition agitators ransacked three three-wheelers at Kashiadanga square in Rajshahi city. They also put blockade at four-bypass points halting inter district bus communication.

Trains left Rajshahi Railway Station in time but the opposition workers barricaded them at different points outside the city.

Indo-Bangla border

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press conference after the meeting held at Hotel Sonargaon.

His Indian counterpart Saifuddin Soz said, "Since some technical problems are unsolved, we need little a more time."

"We have come to the conclusion that we need some more time to resolve all the issues. Discussions will go on. Matters that we have discussed have been referred to the next JRC meeting," he added.

However, none of the ministers agreed to elaborate those technical problems.

"We have decided to move forward through discussions and dialogues in a democratic manner and on the principles of equity and justice. I have no doubt that we shall iron out of our differences on issues," said Soz at the press conference.

"Expert advices are needed to resolve those issues and that's why we need time. There is no other way to resolve the problems we both countries are facing."

Soz told reporters, "We are not finally agreed on any situation but we had thorough discussions...and even then we came to agree on something, we couldn't do it because we have to have a design."

The two countries will resolve the problems through the JRC, which "will not waste any time" in future, he said.

Case against Ershad

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assistant arms and explosives expert of Dhaka deputy commissioner's office -- told the court that they knew nothing about the case.

The investigation officer (IO) of Criminal Investigation Department included witnesses who knew nothing about the case, Additional Public Prosecutor Golam Mostafa Khan told The Daily Star, adding that he did not find any reasons why such persons were made witnesses of the case.

The last date of recording deposition of the PW-3 Azimuddin Ahmed, the then secretary of energy and mineral resources ministry, was on February 14, 2000 and since then no witnesses appeared before the court, although all steps had been taken for producing witnesses for their statements.

But the trial court on August 27 issued non-bailable arrest warrants against the rest six witnesses of the case. Following the order, three witnesses out of six appeared before the court yesterday to give their statements.

Judge (in charge) Mohammad Moudud Bachhid of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court recorded statements of two witnesses and fixed October 1 for next hearing of the case. The court could not record the statement of another witness for want of time.

On August 27, the same court adjourned the hearing of the case until yesterday following a time petition from the prosecution.

A team of customs officials held four people including two foreign nationals at Zia International Airport (ZIA) on July 17, 1990 when they were attempting to smuggle 3,000 tola gold worth around Tk 2.5 crore into Bangladesh, the prosecution said.

A smuggling case was filed against the four -- Bernhard Rudiger of Germany, David

Anthony Chalmar Chaker of England, the then manager of ZIA Major (ret) Ashraf Uddin Sekender and Abu Taher, a security guard of ZIA -- with the Cantonment Police Station the same day.

During the investigation, the IO found evidence of Ershad's involvement in the smuggling and his name was included in the charge sheet.

Rudiger, Chalmar Chaker, Ashraf and Taher were convicted and sent to prison on different terms on May 14, 1992.

The trial against Ershad did not start due to a stay order from the higher court.

CASE AGAINST MANJU
Another Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against former energy and mineral resources minister Anwar Hossain Manju in connection with a graft case, although Ershad was discharged from the case due to insufficient evidence on August 24.

Manju pleaded not guilty and demanded judgment on the case after Judge Malik Abdullah Al Amin of the Special Court for Dhaka Division framed charge against him.

Manju and then president Ershad awarded a contract to Scimitar Oils for drilling and exploring 1,650 square kilometres of area in Haripur oil field in 1987, causing a huge loss of \$79,000 to the public exchequer, according to the case filed with Tejgaon Police Station.

Later, an official of the defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed case against Ershad and Manju and the IO pressed charges against them saying that the charges brought against the two were primarily proven.

Earlier, within a period of one month, Ershad was acquitted of four graft cases. Hearings of three more cases will be held on September 20 and 27.

Chavez calls Bush 'the devil'

AP, United Nations

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez took his verbal battle with the United States to the floor of the UN General Assembly on Wednesday, calling President Bush "the devil."

"The devil came here yesterday," Chavez said, referring to Bush's address Tuesday. "He came here talking as if he were the owner of the world."

The leftist leader, who has joined Iran in opposing U.S. influence, accused Washington of "domination, exploitation and pillage of peoples of the world."

"We appeal to the people of the United States and the world to halt this threat, which is like a sword hanging over our head," he said.

He also said the UN "doesn't work" in its current system and is "antidemocratic." He called for reform, saying the U.S. government's "immoral veto" had allowed recent Israeli bombings of Lebanon to continue unabated for more than a month.

"Venezuela once again proposes today that we reform the United Nations," he said. He drew tentative giggles at times from the audience, but also some applause when called US "imperialism" menace.

Chavez lambasted Washington for trying to block Venezuela's campaign for a rotating seat on the UN Security Council. He said if chosen over US-favorite Guatemala in a secret-ballot UN vote next month, Venezuela would be "the voice of the Third World."

The US government warns that Chavez, a close ally of Iran, Syria and Cuba, would be a disruptive force on the council.

EU mission visits

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Amirul Islam and Md Dulal Talukder were present at the meeting.

Termining the meeting a "private" one, EU team member Robert told reporters after the meeting, "We have gathered various information about different issues related to the upcoming election in Chittagong in the private meeting which was quite satisfactory."

She, however, refrained from making any comment on the 30.51 per cent rise of voters in the division in the recently displayed voter list.

District Election Officer Syed Amirul said the meeting will help increase the Election Commission's credibility in working as a neutral organisation.

Earlier, the EU team visited CCC Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, also president of the Chittagong city unit Awami League.

Leaders of Nagarik Committee and several other political organisations were also present at the meeting and exchanged views on election related issues as well as the pre- and post-election situations.

However, the EU mission members did not make any comment on the issues discussed at the meeting.

ATM Nazim Uddin of Workers Party, Kafil Uddin of Gono Forum, Anwarul Azim and Mahmudul Islam of Nagarik Committee were present at the meeting.

IMF may release

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After the fifth round IMF review for the release of the instalment early this month, Finance Minister Saifur Rahman had told reporters in Dhaka that the instalment was unlikely to be released as Bangladesh could not meet some of the IMF conditions.

Chowdhury said the top executives of the BWLs at their separate meetings assured of the release, recognising the practicalities of Bangladesh's next general election going to be held in January 2007.

"They recognised the problem of raising oil price just before the election," he said on the discussions Saifur had with the BWLs bosses.

He further said they were very encouraged at the accelerated pace of poverty reduction in Bangladesh, 9 per cent in the last five years, and at the pace of the country's global integration process.

At the plenary session of the WB and IMF annual meetings on Tuesday, Saifur was critical of the emerging role of the BWLs, particularly for their increasing focus on corruption and governance instead of their mandate to work for poverty reduction.

Huji activist

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information about the bomb explosion.

Mamun is also an accused in the 76-kg bomb recovery case, filed for an attempt to kill Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina.

Earlier on September 10, Hannan was also shown arrested in the same case and interrogated on a ten-day remand while on September 17 his brother Huji member Mohibullah alias Mofiz, was placed on a five-day remand for interrogation.

On completion of his seven-day remand, CID produced Mamun before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka yesterday afternoon and said Mamun should be confined in the jail until the investigation completes.

The blasts left 10 people dead and several others injured on April 16, 2001.

The police earlier arrested 12 people in connection with the Ramna Batumal blasts but all of them were granted bail from the High Court.

Of them, Moulana Akbar Hussain gave a confessional statement to a metropolitan magistrate on June 14, 2001 disclosing names of Mufti Hannan and others involved in the blasts.

KM Hasan

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where she called upon the people to come to Dhaka with oars and sticks if KM Hasan takes charge of the next caretaker government as its chief.

During a point of order, AL lawmaker Rohomat Ali began the debate by saying, "KM Hasan was international affairs secretary of BNP and he was appointed as chief justice by superseding two other justices in the Appellate Division. So he has been controversial from the beginning."

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar in his ruling said, "He (Hasan) was also superseded by others."

Taking the floor AL lawmaker Suranjit Sen Gupta said, "Hasan was politicised in the past. He is politicised now and will remain politicised in the future."

"If a man is politicised, he cannot be neutral and the caretaker government will not be neutral under him if

Shinzo Abe

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The soft-spoken Abe bowed before his mentor Koizumi after the Liberal Democratic Party announced Abe had won the vote to succeed him as party president, a job that automatically leads to the premiership.

"As the first president born after the war, I declare that I will take over the torch of reforms and the torch of idealism," Abe told lawmakers at the party headquarters.

"I will dedicate all my body and soul to build a beautiful country, and a new country -- Japan," Abe said.

Abe said his first priority in office would be "educational reform" -- code word for requiring schools to encourage patriotism, a taboo since Japan's militarist era in World War II.

Abe's views on history are expected to come under intense scrutiny as he seeks to repair relations with neighboring countries, which have been enraged by Koizumi's visits to a contested war shrine.

Abe, whose victory had been predicted for months, secured 464, or two-thirds, of the 703 votes cast by lawmakers and the regional membership of the conservative party, which has ruled Japan almost continuously since 1955.

Foreign Minister Taro Aso, a fellow conservative, came a distant second at 136 votes. Finance Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki, who had cast himself as a dove who could repair sour ties with China, trailed at 102 votes. One vote was invalid.

The parliament will convene in a special session on Tuesday to name Abe as prime minister to replace Koizumi, Japan's longest-serving premier in three decades, who chose to step down despite wide popularity.

Abe has vowed repeatedly to rewrite the US-imposed 1947 constitution which forced Japan to renounce its right to maintain a military.

Thai coup leader

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Meanwhile, leaders around the world expressed shock and disappointment at the sudden overthrow of Thaksin, whose huge popularity in the countryside gave him two landslide election wins.

The United States, the European Union, Australia and New Zealand condemned as undemocratic Thailand's first coup in 15 years.

But analysts said even though the outside world might view it as a step back, it might prove to be a step forward if it cleared the way out of what many saw as an intractable political deadlock threatening the stability of the nation.

"This coup will be different from the previous coups," said Somjai Phagapassavit of Bangkok's Thammasat University.

"Before, it was done in the interests of the military. This time, it was a necessary pre-emptive strike given the violent polarization of Thai society."

The Thai stock market was closed on Wednesday after the coup leaders declared a one-day holiday but analysts polled by Reuters were predicting a five percent drop when it reopened on Thursday.

The baht, which suffered its biggest one-day fall in three years in the hours after the coup, remained under pressure but rebounded somewhat.

The military said the coup was necessary to institute reforms to settle a political stalemate that pitted Thaksin against the political old guard and street campaigners, who accused him of subverting democracy for his family and friends in big business.

Thaksin argued he was democracy's defender against opponents using unconstitutional means, but the crisis undermined investor confidence and curbed economic growth.

Late Tuesday, television showed the armed forces chiefs heading in a motorcade to the palace to report to King Bhumibol, images likely to dampen any agitation in the countryside by associating the coup with the crown.

Asked if he had the backing of the palace, Sonthi told reporters: "No, we had no supporters. We made the decision by ourselves."

AFP adds: Gen Sonthi said King Bhumibol Adulyadej had endorsed him as the head of the interim governing council.