

Cyclone Akash spawns

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airport were cancelled amid inclement weather.

Gusty winds were buffeting the country's coastal zone yesterday. Unusual tidal surge and heavy rain caused flooding in some areas.

The Met office, which named the storm "Akash", forecasted last evening that Akash might move in the north-easterly direction and make landfall in Bangladesh-Myanmar coastal region early today.

Akash was around 375km south-southwest of Cox's Bazar, 460km south-southwest of Chittagong port and 485km south-southeast of Mongla Port as of 6:00pm yesterday.

Danger Signal-7 means a cyclone may make landfall with wind gusts of 62-88km per hour.

"Sea will remain very rough," a special bulletin from the Met office warned people and instructed all fishing boats and trawlers in the northern part of the Bay to anchor at a safe place and remain there until further notice.

The bulletin said Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, Noakhali, Feni, Bhola, Barisal, Patuakhali and Barguna and their offshore islands and chars might experience squally wind with gusts up to 90km per hour accompanied by heavy rain-fall from yesterday afternoon.

Loud speakers were used to notify people living in the coastal areas about Akash and ask them to move to a safer place or government cyclone shelters. The authorities concerned evacuated a few hundred people from a number of chars with no cyclone shelters in Galachipa upazila of Patuakhali. The government also opened up emergency control rooms in coastal upazilas yesterday.

Squally winds, high tide and torrential rain left chars and low-

lying areas of some coastal districts inundated with four to five feet of water. In the capital the effect of the cyclone was also seen. The sky was cloudy and it drizzled sporadically since noon.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) asked all passenger launches shorter than 65 feet in length not to ply until further notice. They hoisted Cautionary Signal-3 for inland vessels.

Our Cox's Bazar correspondent reports: Low-lying areas in Teknaf, Ukhiya, Kubdia, Chokoria, Pekua, Moheshkhali and Kutubdia upazilas were inundated with seawater due to tidal surges. Light rain continued throughout the day in Cox's Bazar and its adjacent areas.

Deputy commissioner of the district held a meeting with the district's Disaster Management Committee to discuss about their course of actions. Volunteers of Red Crescent and other non-government organisations and disaster management organisations have been asked to make necessary preparations.

Our Patuakhali correspondent reports: At least 30 chars under Kalapara, Galachipa and Dashmina upazilas were inundated under five to seven feet of water. The Met office advised Patuakhali river ports to hoist Local Cautionary Signal-2.

Our staff correspondent in Chittagong reports: The Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) asked all ships to anchor further upstream as the sea might get rough. The CPA opened up three control rooms to execute emergency operations from and to monitor the storm while Red Crescent Society and Chittagong City Corporation opened one control room each.

Another drama

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mother to leave the country due to the present 'adverse situation'.

Moreover, Khaleda is reportedly peeved by some of the BNP senior leaders' recent vociferous opposition to her although, according to some party sources, the same leaders happen to be among the persons most benefited by the party's latest stint in state power.

Some of her close aides said she will return soon, once she leaves for Singapore, but other sources said her return might become uncertain as 'she has been facing tremendous pressure to leave the country for a long time'.

"She told us that she lost her weight due to the illness and her son coco is also very sick," said a close aide to Khaleda who met her yesterday.

Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah, an adviser to the BNP chairperson, and who was arrested yesterday, had told reporters on Sunday, "There is still pressure on Khaleda Zia to go to any of the ASEAN countries including Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore."

Arafat Rahman Coco, who had been arrested on April 16 and was later released after questioning about allegations of corruption, his wife Shamila Rahman, his daughters Jafia and Zahia, Khaleda's nephew Saiful Islam Duke and a domestic help were also scheduled to go to Singapore with the former prime minister.

Dr Zobia Rahman, wife of Tarique Rahman however did not agree to leave the country with her mother-in-law as her husband is currently in jail and because the final school exams of her daughter is very near.

In all her previous foreign trips for treatment Khaleda was accompanied by her elder daughter-in-law, who is a physician in profession.

"Madam was looking well during her meeting with the US congressmen on May 12 at the residence of her adviser Reaz Rahman," a party leader told The Daily Star last night adding that treatment is not really the reason why Khaleda is set to leave the country.

Sources said Saeed Iskandar, younger brother of Khaleda Zia, who flew to London last night, will meet his sister in Singapore when she gets there.

Hearing about Khaleda's decision to go to Singapore, her relatives and some party leaders gathered at her cantonment residence to meet her last night. Among others Tarique Rahman's in-laws, BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan, and Emran Saleh Prince met the former premier.

Khaleda Zia reportedly has been in a virtual 'house arrest' since the declaration of emergency, she was not even allowed to visit the national memorial on Independence Day this year. Later law enforcers requested her not to go to her party office and her telephone line was also disconnected.

Earlier the media reported that Khaleda faced pressure from the government to go into an exile in Saudi Arabia but the country's government did not

issue her a visa as she did not want to leave home willingly.

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain later told reporters that some leaders of BNP had suggested the government to send the party chief abroad to expedite the government's reform initiatives.

On April 19 a BNP leader filed a writ petition with the High Court challenging the reported confinement of Khaleda Zia to her house and sought a directive from the court so she could not be sent into exile.

Al-Qaeda asks US to stop search for its soldiers

AP, Baghdad

An al-Qaida front group that claims it has captured American soldiers warned the United States yesterday to stop searching for them and suggested it attacked the U.S. convoy as revenge for the rape and murder of a local teenager last year.

The US military also said for the first time it believes the three missing soldiers were abducted by al-Qaida-linked militants after an attack that included three roadside bombs.

"What you are doing in searching for your soldiers will lead to nothing but exhaustion and headaches. Your soldiers are in our hands. If you want their safety, do not look for them," the Islamic State of Iraq said on a militant Website.

"You should remember what you have done to our sister Abeer in the same area," the statement said, referring to five American soldiers who were charged in the rape and killing of 14-year-old Abeer Qassim al-Janabi and the killings of her parents and her younger sister last year.

Three soldiers have pleaded guilty in the case one of the most shocking atrocities committed by U.S. troops in the Iraq war.

Three U.S. soldiers have been missing since Saturday, since a deadly attack on their convoy in Mahmoudiyya, about 20 miles south of Baghdad. The attack also killed four U.S. soldiers and an Iraqi soldier, according to the military, which had described the Iraqis as an interpreter.

On Sunday, the Islamic State of Iraq claimed that it had captured U.S. soldiers in the deadly attack in the Sunni area, which is known as the "triangle of death" and is an al-Qaida stronghold.

If the claim proves true, it would mark one of the most brazen attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq, a coalition of eight insurgent groups, including al-Qaida in Iraq.

About 4,000 U.S. troops backed by aircraft, intelligence units and Iraqi forces have been scouring the farming area around Mahmoudiyya and the nearby town of Youssifiyah for three days, as the military promised to make every effort available to find the missing soldiers.

On Monday, U.S. military spokesman Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell, IV said: "At this time, we believe they (the three soldiers) were abducted by terrorists belonging to al Qaida or an affiliated group, and this assessment is based on highly credible intelligence information."

Ex-MP Wadud

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Emergency Powers Act 2007, following an appeal by ACC Deputy Director Nurul Alam who filed a graft case on March 22 against the former lawmaker for illegally amassing wealth worth around Tk 6.15 crore, court sources said.

Nurul Islam is also the Investigation Officer (IO) of the case.

The ACC official mentioned in the case that Wadud provided false information in his wealth statement submitted to the commission on February 25.

Following the court order, all of the eight categories of properties (both mobile and immobile) of Wadud have been brought under the government control, sources said.

Wadud faces at least five cases on different charges, said sources at Khagrachhari Police Station.

Earlier on February 22, police took control of Wadud Bhuiyan's luxurious Khagrachhari residence 'Baitah' including its goods after completion of value assessment by a taskforce from Dhaka and Khagrachhari district administration.

The joint forces arrested Wadud, one of the 50 top corruption suspects on the ACC list, on February 4.

He is now in Comilla Central Jail.

Ctg mayor

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The ambulance carrying the port city mayor reached Chittagong Central Jail at around 2:40am and was sent to CMCH from there. He was taken to the Coronary Care Unit (CCU) where the physicians immediately conducted primary examination on him.

A 10-member medical board was formed headed by Dr Monzoor Morshed Mahmud, the head of the CMCH cardiology department, and comprised of specialists for his treatment.

At a press briefing, Dr Monzoor said that when Mohiuddin was brought to the hospital he was complaining of pain in the chest and lower abdomen, respiratory problems and nausea. He was also suffering from insomnia and eye problems, he added.

There was some improvement in his condition by afternoon, the concerned doctors at CMCH said.

The medical board was to sit again to examine his condition as soon as the reports of different medical tests carried on him are available, the sources in the medical board said.

Meanwhile, the mayor's wife Hasina Mohiuddin and their four daughters met him early in the morning after they obtained necessary permissions from district and police administration and jail authorities concerned.

Mohiuddin was arrested by the joint forces from his Chashma Hill house in Sholashahar on March 7 and sent to Chittagong Central Jail. He was shifted to Bandaranaike Jail on March 9.

Ershad

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way to a three-day visit to Rangpur.

On the government's alleged bid to send Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina and BNP chief Khaleda Zia abroad, Ershad said the government's decision to send them outside the country was wrong. If there were any allegations of corruption against any leader, their trials should be held in the country.

Asked about the prevailing state of emergency, he said it does not create any problems for the country.

JMB leader

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press release confirming his arrest.

During interrogation by Rab, Montejar confessed to having ties with the JMB.

He was president of Borotara union Jamaat-e-Islami till 2001 and later joined JMB through militant kingpin Asadullah Al Galib's Ahle Hadith Andolon, Bangladesh (Ahab), police said.

Orion group

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(Obaidul Karim's son) and Salman's wife, Zerin Karim (Obaidul Karim's daughter), Mashurul Karim (son of Rezaul Karim) and Labeeba Karim (daughter of Rezaul Karim).

The accounts statements of Orion Group Director Mujibul Haque and his wife Quamrunnahr Haque were also sought.

The companies under the Orion Group whose accounts information were asked are -- Kohinoor Chemical Company Limited, Orion Infusion Limited, Beacon Pharmaceuticals Limited, Orion Laboratories Limited, Royal Trading Corporation, Bangladesh Aero Vision Limited, Star Associates, Niazi Engineering, Agro Board Limited, Reedisa Knitex Limited, Reedisa Spinning Limited, Belhassa Accom Limited, Belhassa Accom and Associates Limited, BON Consortium Limited, Agrabad Accom Consortium Limited, Arab Contractor Limited, Orion Gas Limited, BS Communications Limited, Amaradesh Publications Limited, Accom Engineering Company Limited, East West Airlines Limited, Noakhali Gold Foods Limited, Accom Aviation Services, Accom Properties Limited, Interio Accom Consortium Limited, Orion Mashroom Limited, Avian Management Services Limited, Orion Trading Corporation Limited, Jaflogn Tea Garden and Prudential Securities Limited.

Voter listing at camps

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Spanish bull fight? The Election Commission is in a bullfight and we are fighting. We may be scarred if we loose the fight. So, we have to win it," said Huda, who was appointed as the CEC following the resignation of controversial CEC Justice Aziz.

The number of units has been increased from 8,000 to 12, 000 to expedite the task, the CEC said, adding, "We are proceeding with the 18-month timeframe. A pilot project will start within next 10 to 12 days in an urban and an remote area."

"It's a massive task. Ten crore forms will have to be printed to collect particulars about the voters," the CEC added.

The EC will soon start the process of procuring the equipment that includes 12,000 web-cams, and the same number of digital cameras, laptops and printers.

"We will have the first instalment of the required equipment in July and the rest will reach here by September," the CEC said.

Asked about the discussion with the chief adviser, he said the only agenda was to find out the method of preparing the voter list with photographs. "The chief adviser assured us of providing all sorts of assistance to prepare the voter list."

Replying to a query the CEC said they did not discuss the issue of lifting the embargo on indoor politics.

At a meeting with the law adviser on April 4, the CEC had asked the government to lift the embargo on indoor politics allowing the EC to hold dialogue with the political parties on electoral reforms.

Cyclone threatens

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authorities have asked to hoist danger Signal Number 3 last night and were expecting the cyclone to hit the port city in the early hours today.

The signs of the first cyclone this year, forced both the home and the visiting teams to practise inside the indoor facilities at the stadium due to the wet outfield and completely soaked wickets at the nets.

The match, scheduled to start at 9.30pm, will be telecast live on Bangladesh Television and satellite channel NEO Sports. India took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series after winning both the ODIs in Dhaka last week.

Tigers captain Habibul Bashar, however, was more worried about injury than the weather. He was not sure of the final eleven as Mohammad Ashraful's replacement in all-rounder Forhad Reza was also down with high fever.

The selectors in an effort to overcome the injury crisis have called up Tushar Imran, Mehrab Hossain and Rajin Islam. The trio left Dhaka for Chittagong last night by road after their scheduled flight was cancelled due to rough weather.

Charges framed

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case on April 5 with the sessions judge's court seeking an arrest warrant against Mamun for not submitting his wealth statement to the commission within the stipulated time.

Following the case, the court issued arrest warrant against Mamun and directed the authorities concerned to send a copy of the arrest warrant to the police station concerned. It also directed the police station to submit a report to the court within the next scheduled date.

The court fixed May 17 for trial of the case and summoned complainant and other witnesses to appear on the scheduled date.

As Judge Mohammad Ashraf Hossain of the Fifth Special Court, set up at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar MP Hostel, read charges against Mamun, he pleaded not guilty and sought justice from the court.

On February 18, the ACC directed Mamun to submit his wealth statement within 72 hours, but neither he nor any representatives on his behalf submitted the statement.

TARIQUE SHOWN ARRESTED
Tarique was shown arrested in a case filed for extorting Tk 4.89 crore from a construction firm owner.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mamun Al Rashid passed the order following a request to show Tarique arrested in the case filed by Abu Shahed Sahel, coordinator of Aclrd, a sister concern of Reza Construction and Al-Amin Construction, with Gulshan Police Station on May 4.

According to the complainant, Mamun extorted Tk 4.89 crore from him on different dates between 2004 and 2006 in cash and cheque with the assistance of Tarique.

In the FIR, the plaintiff said he could not dare to file any case against Mamun at that time fearing reprisal and added that he now lodged the case assistance has changed.

Earlier, Mamun confessed to a magistrate where he involved Tarique with the extortion, the investigation officer (IO) of the case said.

Talking to reporters Election Commissioner Sahul Hossain, who also met the chief adviser along with the CEC, said the public procurement rules would be relaxed as much as possible to complete the procurement.

Asked whether the EC's decision to prepare the voter list by setting up camps contradicts the existing electoral rules that say the voter list will be prepared by visiting door to door, the election commissioner said the law will be amended before starting the filed level task.

Asked how people will be encouraged to register his or her name as voter by visiting the camps, as they are accustomed to be voters staying at homes, the CEC said massive campaign will be launched by engaging different NGOs and media to encourage people.

When his attention was drawn to the EC's bitter experience regarding updating the voter list by staying at different offices in last year, the CEC said the task for updating the voter list and preparing the voter list with photographs is totally different.

At all levels in the preparation of the voter list, the army will be involved but they will stay at upazila headquarters, he said.

"The voter list with photographs will be prepared under the direct supervision by the Election Commission," Huda said.

Under the full digital system, voters' photographs, particulars, and fingerprints will be in the voter list, he said. "Some 20 to 25 minutes will be required to complete the process of registering a person as a voter and preparing his national identity cards."

Rab officer

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Moghbazar intersection and at one time he grabbed one of the suspects.

The suspect, Akter Hossain, 35, during a tussle with Nuruzzaman, fired a shot that hit the official in the lower abdomen.

Bullet-hit Nuruzzaman did not lose his grip till his team members arrested Akter with a US-made pistol loaded with four bullets. A bullet cartridge was also recovered from the spot. The other five suspects however managed to flee the scene.

"Akter is a listed criminal and he confessed to be a member of the gang run by commissioner Chowdhury Alam [BNP leader, currently in jail]," said Sultan Mohammad Nurani, commanding officer of Rab 3.

The attack on Rab official prompted Ramna police to carry out separate raids in the area. Listed criminal Hira, another suspected member of the attempted robbery, was apprehended from hotel Diamond during the raids. Following Hira's confessional statement, a pistol and three bullets were recovered from the same area.

Police picked up 15 others from Moghbazar area. They were later produced before a Dhaka court.

"The bandits are most likely gang members of top listed criminal Subrata Bain," said AKM Doulat Akbar, officer in charge of Ramna Police Station.

After the attack on the Rab official, Rab personnel charged batons indiscriminately on everyone and injured more than 50 onlookers including beggars and passers-by. The Rab members also dragged locals out of their houses and business establishments and beat them up severely as they failed to provide any information about the assailants.

Around 200 Rab 3 personnel cordoned off the Moghbazar intersection area and searched residential hotels, shops and business establishments. They also body-searched pedestrians.

"The Rab members dragged me out of my shop and beat me up mercilessly on the footpath as I failed to give any information about the incident," said Razzak, owner of Razzak Sanitary near Hotel Parosh.

Rab picked up 10 people from the area, but they were released later after questioning.

Rab was conducting raids in possible hideouts of the five other gang members involved in the robbery attempt till 7:00pm.

Court orders

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the counsel for Hasina seeking delisting of the case from the order of the day, apprehending that they might not get justice if the hearing took place in the court, court sources said.

When the court resumed, Deputy Attorney General Helaluddin Mollah prayed for fixing the date of hearing of the long-pending case.

Opposing the government move, the counsel for Hasina, mentioning a recent-past reference, prayed for de-listing the case on grounds that her client 'might not get justice in the court'.

After hearing both sides, a division bench comprising Justice Sharif Uddin Chaklader and Justice M Emdadul Huq passed the order.

Growth of banks

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country and its poor to have a corruption-free system."

The Bangladesh Bank data for the calendar year's first quarter show deposits in four nationalised commercial banks dropped by 1.69 percent while their credits fell by 1.48 percent.

Although overall deposit in the three private commercial banks (PCBs) went up by 3.86 percent and overall credit up by 1.49 percent, many PCBs face a grim future as credits in those fell in the first quarter, with only a handful of them pulling up the numbers.

Meanwhile, overall deposit in nine foreign commercial banks (FCBs) rose by 1.75 percent, while overall credit went up 0.29 percent, but credits in a number of FCBs went down.

In the five specialised banks, deposits increased by 0.5 percent, while credits dropped by 0.98 percent.

Khaled, also former managing director of a number of banks, told The Daily Star that a number of people, who are not necessarily corrupt but had evaded taxes, withdrew large chunks of money from their bank accounts as the joint forces and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) have been checking bank accounts as part of the anti-corruption crackdown, contributing to the trend of low deposit growth.

An NCB high official said there is a state of fear and lack of confidence among the investors since the start of the state's crackdown on corruption.

He said the banks have also been affected by withdrawals from recently matured deposit pension schemes.

Hannan Shah, son held

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ex-army officer turned politician since the caretaker government started crackdown on corrupt high profile politicians, businessmen and professionals.

After a long political hibernation, Hannan Shah became active in BNP politics in the recent weeks when other front ranking party leaders kept low profile amidst state of emergency and crackdown on corrupt politicians by the interim government.

He usually spoke for BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia who apparently remained interned at her cantonment residence since the January 11 changeover. Recently he told reporters that pressure is still on for Khaleda Zia's going abroad.

Witnesses said over 200 plainclothes and uniform law enforcers cordoned off the house of Hannan Shah on road No 5 since 1:00pm.

At one stage around 15 of them went to the first floor of the four-storey building and asked Hannan Shah to go with them to the police station when Hannan wanted to know whether they had any written order, Hannan Shah's personal officer Mohammad Selim told The Daily Star.

The law enforcers said they did not have any written order, but they had come to arrest him at the directive of their high-ups.

"Sir [Hannan Shah] then told the law enforcers that he would go with them after having his lunch," Selim said, adding that after launch Hannan offered Zohar prayers and then went with the law enforcers at around 2:00pm. His elder son

Rezaul Hannan was also arrested with him.

"My father has been arrested for his outspoken role for the party," Shah Riazul Hannan, younger son of Hannan Shah, told reporters.

Following the arrest, Hannan Shah's wife Nahid Hannan fainted.

"Don't worry. Inshaallah, I will return with due honour," Nahid Hannan quoted her husband as saying after regaining her consciousness.

Hannan and his arrested son were first taken to Cantonment Police Station from where Kapashia police took him to their custody.

Hannan Shah is accused in four cases, the latest one being filed against him and his son Rezaul Hannan on Saturday night with Kapashia Police Station on May 13, reports a correspondent from Gazipur.

REMAND

Police produced Hannan Shah and Rezaul Hannan before the court of First Class Magistrate Kazi Nurunnahar at around 5:45pm seeking seven-day remand for each of them in connection with the extortion case filed against seven people including them with Kapashia Police Station on May 13, reports a correspondent from Gazipur.

After hearing from both prosecution and defence the court granted five-day remand for each of them.

Hannan and his son looked dejected on the dock.

Claiming his innocence, Hannan Shah told the court that he is a victim of political vengeance.

Import policy

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a meeting with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in the chair approved the import policy after a committee on economic affairs reviewed it.

The new policy reduced control over imports at limited level, amended few provisions of the previous policy and introduced some new provisions considering the need of time.

Explaining the objective of the policy the adviser said it will help raise production and make exports competitive. It will ensure import and distribution of quality items.

Replying to a question he said, impact of the policy cannot be ascertained immediately. It will take some time.

Aziz said the concept of imposing high import tariff to protect domestic industry is no more effective in the present day world. "It only makes local industry inefficient," he said stressing the need for improving efficiency of the domestic industry.

He said import duty on finished products remained in the highest slab of the duty structure.

Asked how much the policy would address the main focus of poverty reduction the adviser expressed the hope that prices of essentials will come down with reduction of duty. That will lessen the burden