

Driving downpour deluges Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rainfall of 103 millimetres in six hours paralysed the capital yesterday with the city's streets turned into virtual canals and passengers abandoning stranded vehicles to struggle through knee high waters on foot.

The met office reported that a cyclonic storm formed by a depression over the Bay of Bengal caused the heavy downpour and predicted further heavy rains in the next 24 hours.

The flooding again exposed the

weakness of the capital's drainage and the half-hearted attempts to improve the system over decades.

The tales of chaos and disruption were repeated in many parts of the country, especially in the northern districts.

In Dhaka the rising water inundated houses and shops in several areas of the city inflicting heavy economic losses on business owners and leaving thousands of householders to mop up the damage.

Among those most seriously affected were office workers

attempting to get to their jobs. Stuck in the gridlock caused by the flooded streets, thousands were forced to abandon buses and cars and plough through the inundated roads, often barefooted.

One office worker said it had taken him more than three hours to make the four kilometer journey from Dhamondi to Karwan Bazaar by car, a journey that normally takes 15-20 minutes. "It would have been quicker to get to Comilla. Hours of working time have been lost, there will be a heavy economic cost," he said.

Zunayed Ahmed, a resident of Raza Bazar area, said he found the road in front of his house submerged under water. "I found all roads up to the children's hospital in Shyamoli under water. Except for some high roads, the whole Mohammadpur area also seemed under water even at noon," he said.

The food and disaster management ministry asked the electronic media to broadcast special bulletins on the natural calamity and the government set up control rooms at all deputy commissioners' (DC)

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

A vehicle tries to power through the stagnant water on Mirpur Road near Russell Square in the capital yesterday after hours of pouring rain in the morning.

Reforms, polls within next year: Mainul

UNB, Dhaka

Law and Information Adviser Mainul Hossain firmly believes that reform of the political parties would be completed and general election held within next year.

He however said if the polls were not held by 2008, political parties would be responsible for that. The law adviser noted that several leaders of Awami League and BNP are now talking about their parties' reform and for changing their supreme leaderships. "That's good. We have created this awareness among the leaders."

Mainul was speaking to reporters

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Call for global efforts to fix minimum wage

Roundtable discusses problems of Bangladeshi workers abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Adviser for foreign and expatriates welfare ministries Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury has proposed a global collective effort to set minimum wages for migrant workers at different levels of skill and experience.

"No country can implement the minimum wage policy alone. The global community must come forward to make it a reality," he said

while speaking as chief guest at a policy dialogue on safe migration and remittance at Brac Centre Inn in the capital yesterday.

The speakers at the dialogue jointly organised by The Daily Star and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) urged the government to immediately ratify the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and

Their Families.

They also stressed the need for ensuring minimum wage for migrant workers, skill development training, formation of an international bank for expatriates, special incentives for regular remitters, enactment of a consumer protection law for expatriates, mobile banking system, e-mail connectivity to all bank

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2ND LIST OF GRAFT SUSPECTS

Tarique, uncle Shamim submit wealth reports

8 others seek time as ACC deadline expires

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six more top corruption suspects including former prime minister Khaleda Zia's detained son Tarique Rahman and her brother Shamim Eskandar submitted their wealth statements to the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) on the last day

of the seven-day deadline yesterday.

Tarique showed in his statement that he owns movable and immovable properties worth Tk 1.37 crore, and his uncle Shamim who was a Biman official declared that his wealth is worth around Tk 4 crore and 75 bhoris of gold.

With yesterday's submissions, 13 including the six out of the 21 high profile corruption suspects on the ACC's second list of corruptionists now have their wealth statements submitted, while eight others applied to the commission seeking seven more

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BDR starts drive today against selling sugar at higher price

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) launches a drive in the city today against those who would charge higher price of sugar than the usual rate.

They have already started warning the shopkeepers through Dhaka City Corporation to take necessary actions against those who would charge excess price of sugar.

Sugar price has marked a rise by Tk 3 per kilogram immediately after the announcement of the budget for 2007-08, proposing increase in specific import duty on raw sugar import from Tk 2,250 per tonne to Tk 4,000.

"The budgetary measure comes into effect on July 1. If anyone charges higher prices before that day, we'll take necessary actions against him," Chief Coordinator of BDR's 'Operation Dal-Bhat' Lt Col Fazle Akbar told UNB.

He said sugar should be sold at the price as it was before the announcement of the budget.

Mayor Minu freed on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi Mayor and ex-BNP lawmaker Mizanur Rahman Minu was freed yesterday afternoon after the district and sessions judge granted him bail.

Minu along with two other BNP leaders were sent to jail on Wednesday in connection with an extortion case.

The two others-- Nazrul Huda, vice-president of Rajshahi district BNP, and Shafikul Haque Milon, former general secretary of Rajshahi city BNP-- were also freed at the same time.

Minu with his wife Salma Shahadat left the jail premises on one of his friend's private car at around 5:45pm.

Minu's elder brothers Hafizur Rahman Laki and Kashem Rizvi Ganu, ward commissioners including Mohammad Masud, Anjumand Ara and Rozi Parvin were present at the jail gate. But the mayor did not talk with anyone.

Earlier in the morning, District and Sessions Judge Abu Bakar Siddik heard Minu's lawyers and

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EC test case launched amid rain, enthusiasm

1,288 enrolled as voters on first day in Sripur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission's (EC) pilot project to gather field level experience of preparing simultaneously a voter list and national identity cards began in Sripur municipality of Gazipur yesterday.

The incessant rain throughout the day could not dampen the locals' enthusiasm for the voter roll with photographs as many showed up at the registration centres to be listed as voters.

On the opening day, 1,288 people were registered as voters. They welcomed the commission's move as they believe an electoral roll with photographs would ensure incontrovertibly their right to vote.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony at Sripur Pilot High School premises, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda and Chief of Army Staff

General Moeen U Ahmed termed the project a milestone in the history of Bangladesh. By beginning the work towards a fully digital roll, the EC has in fact set about a 'historic journey'.

Both of them said the voter list with photographs will better protect the people's voting right.

"The voter list with photographs is needed to take the country a step forward by holding a free and fair election. We will have to do the job right in the greater national interests," said CEC Huda.

Saying that the accuracy of the voter lists prepared in the past had often been questioned, he sought cooperation of the local people and political parties for successful completion of the project.

Army chief General Moeen observed that a flawless voter list with photographs is a prerequisite for the polls to be held in a free and

fair manner.

He said the army has come forward with its manpower and equipment to help prepare the voter list in the interest of the country.

The main project will begin in August in the light of the experience to be gained from the pilot project, he added.

Election commissioners Sahul Hossain and Brigadier General (retired) M Sakhawat Hossain, GOC of the Nine Infantry Division Major General M Ashab Uddin and Military Secretary to of the Army headquarters Major General M Shafiqul Islam were present on the occasion.

Following the inaugural session, the CEC and the army chief visited the project site to inspect the work on voter list and national ID.

Under the three-week long pilot

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Falu remanded for first time

Quader, Lobi sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Detained former BNP lawmaker Mosaddak Ali Falu was for the first time placed on a three-day remand in a criminal case while Chief Conservator of Forests Osman Gani taken on a three-day fresh remand.

In his forwarding report, ACC Assistant Director Sheikh Abdus Salam, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, mentioned that Falu needs to be quizzed during remand for gathering vital clues about government relief materials that were seized from the office of a ward commissioner of Falu's constituency as well as whereabouts of his accomplices involved in misusing the relief materials.

Proceedings of the case filed against former law minister barrister Moudud Ahmed for possession of contraband liquors were adjourned yesterday following a time petition by defence lawyers.

FALU REMANDED

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday produced Mosaddak Ali Falu before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Jagannath Das Khokon at 1:00pm seeking a seven-day remand.

In his forwarding report, ACC Assistant Director Sheikh Abdus Salam, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, mentioned that Falu needs to be quizzed during remand for gathering vital clues about government relief materials that were seized from the office of a ward commissioner of Falu's constituency as well as whereabouts of his accomplices involved in misusing the relief materials.

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REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government will provide a minimum diesel subsidy of Tk 100 for each farmer through the local block supervisors, according to a draft guideline prepared by the agriculture ministry.

Farmers, who currently use 13 lakh deep and shallow diesel pumps across the country, will receive the subsidy for irrigating their croplands in the Boro season.

The finance ministry has already okayed the guideline, sources said.

The agriculture ministry also has plans to formulate another draft guideline for distributing subsidised fertiliser through 'card-rationing' system.

According to finance ministry

figures, a 21 percent hike in diesel prices by the government in April has pushed up the cost of producing a kilogram of rice by Tk 0.50.

In addition, the government plans to introduce an automatic price formula for petroleum products next fiscal year, to allow local prices to better respond to international market forces.

In the budget speech last Thursday, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam said, "relevant guidelines have been framed to adjust the domestic price of petroleum products with the price changes in international market."

"A committee envisaged in the guidelines will review the price of

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PHOTO: STAR

FROM LEFT... Election Commissioner Sakhawat Hossain, Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda and Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed observe voter listing activities under a pilot project in Sripur, Gazipur, yesterday.

Govt to make getting passport easier

17 more regional offices to be set up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry yesterday decided to recruit passport agents and set up 17 more regional offices to make passport issuance and renewal process easier.

The agents will be authorised to receive application and fees, deposit fees to the banks, attest and submit documents to the passport office, and distribute passport books.

An inter-ministerial meeting chaired by Home Secretary Md Abdul Karim took the decision.

Sources said that advertisements will be placed in different national dailies soon, seeking application for the position of

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