

Marooned people cry

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mothers cannot breastfeed their children.

Syeda Begum, 20, one of over 12,000 people who took shelter on Ranigram embankment in Sirajganj, said she could not breastfeed her three-month-old boy, as she had nothing to eat for a day.

"We have no food left for tomorrow and we are drinking impure water as all the tube wells went under water," said Josna Begum, 60, of Khokshabari in Sirajganj Sadar upazila.

There are around 2,000 children, along with their mothers, on the Ranigram embankment where there are no toilets. "We are in real trouble here, there is nobody to help us," said Ankhi, 24, mother of a six-year-old.

Carpenter Jafurul Islam, 30 of Khokshabari upazila, said he has been borrowing rice to feed his seven-member family, as he could not find work for the last 12 days. "We require rice worth Tk 66 a day. I do not know how I will repay the debt," he said.

Lakshmi Bewa, 45, of Kawakhola char said the flood washed away her house, furniture and paddy on the field. "We took shelter on the western embankment of Jamuna. We managed to keep our children half-fed but the grownups are passing days without food."

The Sirajganj flood control room said it has asked the Department of Public Health and Engineering to provide water treatment systems in the flood-affected areas. Apart from one such treatment facility belonging to Unicef at Ranigram embankment, no such facilities were found in the district.

Neck-deep floodwater forced almost all shops, kitchen markets, clinics in Sirajganj Sadar to close, leaving the marooned people helpless. "I have never seen such devastating flood. The flood in 1988 was not so devastating," 65-year-old Hazrat Ali told The Daily Star.

Inundated by floodwater, communication between Kazipur and Sirajganj and Bogra snapped. Power outage has also worsened as several electric poles were uprooted. According to Water Development Board (WDB), at least four lakh people in nine upazilas of Sirajganj are marooned.

Roads and Highways Department officials said at least 120 roads in the district went under water and most of these were completely or partially damaged. District administration said it set up 200 shelter centres in different places where over 60,000 people are staying.

At least 173 tonnes of rice and Tk 4 lakh in cash have been allocated for relief. Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) yesterday reported that water level of the Jamuna has started to fall upstream at Noonthawa and Chilmari points while it continues to rise downstream at Bahadurabad, Sirajganj and Aricha.

According to district Agriculture Extension Department, paddy on 10,7000 hectares and vegetables on 1,600 hectares went under water several days ago, our correspondent in Manikganj reports.

The diversion road of the previously damaged Dotoria Bridge at Ghior went under water yesterday snapping road communications between Manikganj, Dhaka and Ghior, Daulupur upazilas.

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Ittekh said, "We in Bangladesh see the US as a close partner, and wish to work with them across a range of issues including development, anti-terrorism, non-proliferation and human rights and dignity."

He added, "I also explained to him the plans and programmes of the caretaker government and the 'roadmap' leading to the elections by December 2008."

"Bangladesh is a mainstream voice of moderation and is a responsible international actor, which the US appreciates very much. Mr Negroponte has wished us success in our endeavours," added the foreign adviser.

Bilateral relations and international situations were among the issues discussed at the meeting.

Govt appeals

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her tried under the emergency power rules.

Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of Eastcoast Trading Pvt Ltd, lodged the case with Gulshan Police Station on June 13 this year. He accused Hasina and AL presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim of extorting from him Tk 2.99 crore in 2000 in connection with the contract for Siddhinganj power plant.

The joint forces arrested Hasina on July 16 and the same day a magistrate's court sent her to a house designated as a sub-jail on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex.

On July 24, Gulshan police indicted her together with her sister Sheikh Rasheda and cousin Sheikh Selim.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Gulshan Police Station Obaidul Haque submitted the charge sheet under sections 385(extrition)/109 (abettment)/34 (criminal liability) of the penal code.

He did not include in the charge sheet Section 19(1) of the Emergency Power Rules, 2007 but the home ministry on July 16 notified that the emergency rules shall apply to the charges considering "public importance" of the case. The HC order on Monday stayed the government decision.

Meanwhile, Awami League yesterday called the power of attorney from Hasina to fight the second 'extortion' case against her and the government's appeal in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

The jail authorities handed over four separate copies of Hasina's power of attorney to one of the staff of Sudha Sadan in the morning, said Barrister Fazle Noor Taposh, one of the lawyers of the AL chief.

US for polls

FROM PAGE 1
and Cooperation-tomorrow.

Meeting Iftekhar, the US deputy secretary also noted that the caretaker government enjoys "popular support" and appreciated the country's "voice of moderation" in the Muslim world, according to a foreign ministry press release from the Philippines capital.

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UGC reform

FROM PAGE 1

Islam yesterday.

Education Secretary M Momtazul Islam made phone calls on July 30 to UGC members Faisul Islam Farruqui, M Mahbub Ullah, Sultan Hossain and Tareque Shamsur Rahman, appointed during BNP-Jamaat coalition regime, and asked them to resign.

Later, Farruqui, UGC member and former vice-chancellor of Rajshahi University (RU), who was allegedly involved in corruption regarding the controversial appointment of 544 RU employees, resigned willingly.

Farruqui said that he resigned as UGC member on personal ground.

However, the three other UGC members said that they would not resign until they are informed about the reason.

"I shall not resign without knowing my fault. I request the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to investigate the allegations against us. I think I have the right to know about my faults," said Prof Tareque Shamsur Rahman.

"Why did the caretaker government request me to resign without informing me my faults?" he questioned.

Another UGC member Prof Mahbub Ullah termed the verbal orders a conspiracy against them.

"I shall resign from both the posts of UGC and Chittagong University (CU) if corruption charges against me are proved," he said requesting the caretaker government to reconsider its decision.

He asked pro-reform leaders to talk to Khaleda sincerely... They can even use him as a mediator for such tasks if they are really interested, he added.

On Hannan's mediation offer, Ashraf Hossain questioned, "Whether he is the proper person for it."

Hannan criticised some other advisers to the BNP chairperson, saying they did not do politics at field level nor contested any elections. So, how can they be aware of the party affairs?

"They were chairmen of different organisations or ambassadors in the last five years. So, they had no time to think about the party (BNP)," he said in an oblique reference to former ambassador Mofazzal Karim, former Red Crescent chairman ZA Khan and former Privatisation Board chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury.

EC puts the cart

FROM PAGE 1
Justice Naimuddin Ahmed also echoed the same view.

"Anybody can file writ petition with the High Court challenging the Election Commission's unlawful activity of preparing the voter list. If the issue is challenged, the commission will have to face difficulties in preparing the voter list and the parliamentary election will be delayed," he observed.

Asked about the opinion of legal experts, Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain said that the government has approved in principle the draft for amending the ordinance.

"Before launching the task officially, Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982 will be amended," he said.

Contacted, another Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Shakhat Hossain told The Daily Star that Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed would formally inaugurate the task for preparing the voter list with photographs in RCC area on August 5.

Asked how come the enumerators started doing their job without the amendment of the existing laws, he said that the enumerators are only distributing voter registration forms in line with the existing laws, but they are not collecting any particulars at present.

"The law will be amended before the task of taking their [voters'] photographs begins," he asserted.

On July 21, the Council of Advisers approved in principle the draft to amend the Electoral Rolls Ordinance 1982 for preparing the voter list with photographs, but it is not made a law yet by promulgating an ordinance.

Meanwhile, the EC did not issue any written order to begin the task in RCC area. A senior official in the EC Secretariat during his visit to RCC area verbally ordered the local election office to kick off the task in advance so that the chief adviser can witness the preparation of the voter list with photographs, sources said.

The previous EC led by Justice MA Aziz gave rise to widespread controversy as it did not properly follow the electoral laws and Supreme Court directives for preparing the voter roll by updating the existing list.

The Supreme Court ultimately declared the voter list prepared for the stalled ninth parliamentary elections null and void.

To avoid controversy, legal experts suggested that the EC keep a provision in its proposal to give a retrospective effect to the amended electoral rolls ordinance to justify its action before amending the law.

The factory owes nearly Tk 63.41 crore to its labourers and employees while Tk 77.63 lakh to its officers in arrears. It also owes Tk 34 crore to retired employees. Its unpaid gratuity is Tk 28 lakh while unpaid provident fund is Tk 56 crore.

Deputy general manager of PJML, Mahbub Alam, was not available in his office yesterday afternoon and he could not be reached over telephone for comments either.

On April 19, workers were laid off at three other jute mills. These are Crescent Jute Mills Ltd, Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills Ltd and Star Jute Mills Ltd.

The three mills resumed operations partially in early July. Since then, around two thousand more labourers were laid off from these mills.

With the closing of PJML, the number of jute mills closed in the area will be two. Earlier on December 7, 2002, Daulatpur Jute Mills in Khalishpur was closed.

This time, the enumerators are collecting particulars of prospective voters with new forms and are asking them to visit nearby voter registration centres to have his or her photographs taken.

Meanwhile the four soldiers were abducted at gunpoint while on the way from the garrison town of Bannu to the militant hotbed of Mir Ali in North Waziristan, a senior security official said on condition of anonymity.

"Efforts are underway to recover them," he said.

Earlier a roadside bomb wounded six paramilitary troops, two seriously, as they delivered food to colleagues on the perimeter of the neighbouring tribal district of South Waziristan, security officials said.

Around 8,000 workers and officials of the 14 jute mills will be terminated within this year under golden handshake programme, ministry sources said.

Terminated workers however will be allowed to work on daily basis and the government will arrange training programmes to enhance the workers' skills, sources added.

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City roads

FROM PAGE 1

The Daily Star published a photograph of Abdullahep crossing on Sunday, which showed craters filled with water occupying almost a half of the road while buses were staying on a narrow lane towards the other side of the road in an effort to avoid falling in those craters.

When asked, a number of engineers, preferring anonymity, said substandard construction of roads is responsible to some extent for the dire situation of the roads in the capital.

They however added that the construction contractors should not always be blamed, rather it is the system that should be blamed. The price of bitumen is Tk 5,000 a drum now, but they are instructed to estimate the price at only Tk 3,100. As a result, the contractors have to make do with less than required amounts of materials.

The wearing surface of the roads inside the city is designed to be nine inches thick with the capacity to bear only a limited load of up to 5 tons, but in the absence of a monitoring system, heavily loaded trucks with even up to 20 tons of load are plying through the city roads, and that is one of the reasons for quick deterioration of the roads, said the engineers. The DCC engineers urged for immediate installation of four weighing stations at Aminbari, Jatrabari, Tongi and Pagla for restricting movements of heavily loaded vehicles through the city.

Hasna Banu, an enumerator, told this correspondent yesterday that she has been making door-to-door visits at Ramchandrapur and Ahmedpur under ward 23 since Sunday.

"I am helping voters filling in the forms and I have collected 117 completed voter forms so far," she said.

She had also been informing the prospective voters of the time for visiting voter registration centres to have his or her photographs and fingerprints taken, she added.

Another enumerator Golam Mostafa, who has been working at Ramchandrapur along with his 11 others colleagues, said that he had collected 38 filled up voter forms. "Voters of my area were interested (to enrol) and at times, they took us to their homes," he added.

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The judge also deputed a lawyer as defence counsel following Mufti Hannan's appeal for providing legal assistance.

On July 12, the district judge acquitted 20 of the case, as their names were dropped from the charge sheet.

The Syhet Sadar magistrate on June 26 sent the case records and charge sheets in connection with the grenade attack to the District and Sessions Judge's court for trial.

Senior ASP of CID Munshi Atiqur Rahman earlier submitted charge sheets against the four to the court.

Three people were killed and the Bangladeshi-born British high commissioner and 70 others were injured in the grenade attack after the Juma prayers on 21 May in 2004 on the premises of the shrine of Hafiz Shahjalal (RA).

The Syhet Kotwali police filed a case on the same day and arrested nine leaders of Awami League (AL) students' wing-Bangladesh Chhatra League for their suspected involvement in the attack. However, their involvement could not be established.

Officiates from the Scotland Yard, UK also visited the spot in Syhet.

The cases, lodged with the Syhet Kotwali Police Station, were transferred to the CID later.

In recent years his star has risen with the hugely popular "Munnabhai" films, in which he plays a wisecracking mobster trying to turn over a new leaf.

In the second of the series - "Carry on Munnabhai" -- the ghost of Indian independence icon Mahatma Gandhi steers Dutt's character onto the path of righteousness and true love, all the while dispensing old-fashioned lessons about honesty.

Bollywood was meanwhile in shock over the verdict.

Actress Kirron Kher said she was "shocked and saddened," arguing Dutt "has suffered enough for 14 years (and) he has been exemplary in behaviour."

He was handed over to Shahbagh Police Station at around 1:45pm.

In the case statement, the complainant mentioned that the accused forced him to provide them Tk 75 lakh in return for a Tk 4.51 crore tender