

Flood approaches

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Earlier, in 2004, 78 unions including Dohar, Nawabganj, Keraniganj, Savar, Dhamrai and Dhaka city were inundated. Thirty-nine people died during that time.

At least 81 people have so far been killed in floods across the country and the flood situation is likely to deteriorate further in the country's central parts as the water levels of all major rivers remain above the danger mark.

Around 70 lakh people have been affected by the floods. The floods hit 215 upazilas of 38 districts, causing colossal damage to life and properties.

Flood situation in Manikganj, Munshiganj, Rajbari, Madaripur and Shariatpur, and Dohar and Nawabganj upazilas of Dhaka is expected to further deteriorate in the next 24 hours.

The swelling of Tongi canal and Turag and Shitalakhya may also increase aggravating the flood situation in Bhairab and eastern part of capital Dhaka.

However, the flood situation in Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Bogra, Netrakona and Sunamganj will improve in a couple of days as water levels recede. The flood situation in Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Pabna and Tangail districts is expected to remain unchanged, UNB reports.

Our Manikganj correspondent reports: The overall flood situation of the district deteriorated yesterday even though the water level of the Jamuna went down 2cm at Aricha.

Around eight lakh people have been marooned in the district. They are facing food and drinking water crisis as most of the tube wells went under floodwater.

Julekha, 35, wife of a farmer of Mohadevpur under Shibhalaya upazila, said her house went under six days ago. She with her husband and two children took shelter at Mohadevpur Girls School. She said she sold her goat and spent all her savings on food.

Anura, 60, a widow and a labourer, had no money to buy food. She said nobody came to her with any relief until yesterday when army chief Moeen U Ahmed gave her relief materials at Borongal Gopal Chandra High School.

Our Munshiganj correspondent reports: The flood situation of the district deteriorated yesterday and a section of the Munshiganj-Baligon-Louhojang-Maoa-Dhaka road was washed away.

Road communication between Baligon and Louhojang snapped. A section of Dhaka-Dohar bypass was washed away at Kamargan.

Rising river waters inundated the approach road to the Mukhtarpur ferry pontoon threatening to snap communication between Dhaka and Munshiganj.

Due to a breach in Maoa-Bhagyakul embankment at Louhojang, 50,000 people have been marooned.

Five flood shelters have been opened but relief distribution is inadequate in comparison to demands. According to government officials concerned, 38 unions of six upazilas have been inundated.

Our Netrakona correspondent reports: Flood situation slightly improved in Netrakona but sufferings of the affected people continue due to lack of food, drinking water and medicines.

The affected people of different flood-affected areas alleged that the distributed relief materials distributed by the government were insufficient.

The flood inundated about 400 villages in 10 upazilas of the district affecting at least four lakh people. Many have taken shelter on higher grounds and flood shelters, while some are still living under the open sky.

Our correspondent in Nilphamari reports: The flood situation of the district improved as the floodwater from the Teesta was receding and all rivers of the district including Charalkata, Jamuneswari, Deunai, Burikhora, Buri-teesta, Dhajjan started to withdraw.

The erosion of the bank-protection of the Teesta at Uttar Dauwabari in Jaladhaka upazila has taken a turn for the worse. Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) officials with the help of joint forces were trying to repair the damage.

Diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases have been reported in many areas. An army mobile medical team is moving to the affected areas.

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RD RS), an NGO, distributed 1,500kg of flattened rice, 500kg of molasses, 84-dozen candles and 84-dozen match-boxes among 500 flood victims.

This NGO also sanctioned 10 tube wells to be set up to provide drinking water. All temporary flood shelters have been closed down and the flood victims are returning home.

Our correspondent in Pabna reports: Sufferings of the flood affected people in Pabna increased as the victims continue to deal with drinking water and food shortages and insufficient relief distribution.

More areas were flooded in the district. The Padma is swelling rapidly and at least 50 villages of Shujanagar upazila went under floodwater yesterday.

According to a source, Sagarkandi union of Shujanagar upazila has totally gone under water. Manikhat, Shatbaria, Bhaina and Najirganje union and three wards of Shujanagar municipality were flooded.

District Relief and Rehabilitation Office (DRRO) sources said at least 38 unions of six upazilas of the district were flooded affected. Around 1.77 lakh people of Bera, Faridpur, Bhangura, Chatmohar, and Ishwardi upazilas were marooned.

Only 96 tonnes of rice have been distributed in Faridpur, Bera and Bhangura upazilas of the district. DRRO officials said the allocation of relief is insufficient for the huge num-

ber of flood-affected people.

The district administration has only 100 tonnes of rice and Tk2 lakh for relief distribution, sources said. The administration sought 100 tonnes of rice, Tk 13 lakh, 20,000 saris and lungis for the flood-affected people, said Abul Hosssain, an official of DRRO, yesterday.

A total of 23,480 acres of cropland have been damaged in Pabna while 19,801 acres crops were partly damaged, official sources said.

Our correspondent in Brahmanbaria reports: Two infants drowned in floodwater at Brahmanbaria yesterday.

They were identified as Rakib Mia, 3, of Potoir in Nasiragar upazila and Priti Akter, 2, of Araishida in Ashuganj upazila of the district.

Sixty-five villages including several areas of Brahmanbaria municipality were inundated yesterday.

Our correspondent in Tangail reports: The overall flood situation in Tangail remained unchanged yesterday but scarcity of food and drinking water continues.

According to district administration sources, about 5.36 lakh people of 95 unions in 12 upazilas were flood affected. Besides, crops on 25,410 acres of land were completely damaged while crops on 59,809 acres were partially damaged, they added.

The district administration distributed 100 tonnes of rice, Tk5 lakh in cash and Tk 1 lakh for building houses so far.

Several cracks developed in the Tarakandi-Bhuapur flood-control embankment at Bhuapur upazila and repair works were going on with the help of joint forces.

The repair works of the damaged Compartmentalisation Pilot Project embankment at Gala of Sadar upazila are also going on. A total of 32 shelters were opened for the flood-affected people in the district and so far 8,500 people took shelter in those.

Six people including five children drowned in floodwater at different places in Sadar and Dhobaura upazilas of Mymensingh in the last 24 hours, UNB reports.

The deceased were identified as Anכי Biswas, 5, Moslem, 4, Kasu, 45, Rubel, 16 and Sahida, 7, of Sadar upazila, and Nur Banu, 7, of Dhobaura upazila.

Our Jessore correspondent reports: Heavy downpour and over-flowing rivers inundated 2,100 hectares of croplands of Bhagharpara upazila in Jessore.

Our correspondent in Satkhira reports: Over 5 lakh people in 28 unions of Kalaroa and Tala upazilas in Satkhira and Jhhikargachha, Manirampur and Keshabpur upazilas of Jessore remain marooned while new areas in Kabodak basin went under floodwater.

Crops on over 2,000 acres of lands and over 351 houses were damaged in those areas. Sufferings of the affected people in the region are increasing due to shortages of food, drinking water and medicines.

Our correspondent in Barisal reports: Many people became marooned as flash floods occurred due to sharp rise in water levels of the Meghna, Arial Khan, Tentulia and other tributaries.

Eight thousand people have been marooned in Bhola while 30,000 people have been affected in Muladi upazila of Barisal.

In Barisal Sadar, different areas under Charbaria, Charmonai, Sayestabad, Charbadna and Charamoddi unions were inundated by the Kirtankhola and more than 1,000 families were affected.

A breach in an embankment led to the inundation of different areas in Donarkandi, Magura, Duniarkandi, Chhalbol under Khanjapur union of Gournadi upazila.

Our correspondent in Chandpur reports: Many new areas of Chandpur were inundated yesterday.

In Raj Rajeswar union under Sadar upazila, around 20,000 people have been marooned during the last few days. In Matlab Pura area, all the educational institutions were declared closed.

Due to tremendous currents in the Meghna and the presence of whirlpools, Water Development Board, Chandpur officials sealed off the Town Protection Embankment on the Meghna for people yesterday.

Loan defaulters

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claimed different development organisations in Cox's Bazar on Friday.

At a press conference held under the banner of Cox's Bazar NGO Alliance, COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) said the two farmers were held on charges of assaulting one of its employees Mohsena Begum, manager of Badarkhali branch.

According to the COAST, some local people assaulted Mohsena on June 20 while she was performing duties.

Mohsena filed a complaint with Chakaria Police Station the next day and a general diary on June 25. The two were arrested the next day in connection with the case, according to a press release.

In the press conference, Mohsena said she was compelled to take legal recourse as the local union parishad member threatened her when she approached him to settle the matter.

COAST said the newspapers ran the reports carrying quotes of Shahidullah, general secretary of Chakaria Human Rights Commission, who is also the lawyer of the accused of the case.

Rajuk, Rangs

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Meanwhile, fresh disputes arose yesterday between Rajuk and the building authorities on marking the 'upper area' for demolishing.

Rajuk said they would demolish all the floors beyond 60 feet of the building while the building authorities said the Supreme Court ordered destruction of the upper 16 floors of the building.

Employees of Rangs Group at a press conference yesterday appealed to the government to reconsider the decision of demolishing most part of the Rangs Bhaban.

Several organisations that bought or rented floors of the building, said they would file case against Rangs Group for their huge loss.

At about 8:00am, around 150 workers started work to demolish the remaining internal structures like walls, false ceilings and furniture in presence of Rajuk supervisors and engineers. Structures like lintel and window were also removed.

At one stage the workers started drilling the floors with drill-hammers.

Talking about Rajuk's method of demolishing the building, Deputy Assistant Engineer of Rajuk Abul Kalam Azad said, "Primarily we will make 22 points (hole with 5 feet on each side) on each floor and then use a crane to pull the parts down. Then we will start breaking the columns from topmost floor to the down."

Rajuk Magistrate ASM Emdadud Dastagir told journalists that they have nearly completed demolishing all the internal walls of the building. "Drilling the floors of the building is going on."

A meeting at public works ministry today will decide which method to follow in demolishing the structure, he said.

Regarding the latest controversy about whether 60 feet or fifth floor, he said, "So far as I know, as the attorney general said, the court direction is to keep the lower 60 feet of the structure intact and demolish the remaining. On that consideration, we have to demolish some parts of the fifth floor too."

"As lawyers of Rangs Group objected to this, we will take the decision after getting certified copy of the court order," he added.

Employees of Rangs yesterday were seen removing materials of different floors including the fifth floor where Rankon Engineering is situated.

Many pieces of furniture and other materials were still seen piled up on different floors of the building while normal activities from first to fourth floor seemed paralysed due to the demolishing activities.

Some heavy equipment like air-conditioners were being drawn down with the help of crane.

As only two lifts of the building are running, it was hard for the workers to bring down things and heavy materials from upper floors to the ground.

RANGS STAFFS PRESS BRIEFING

In a press conference at a Chinese restaurant near Rangs Bhaban officials and employees of Rangs Group yesterday said the government should reconsider the decision to demolish Rangs Bhaban.

Ratna Roy, secretary to the managing director of Rangs Group, said, "Still there are alternatives to demolishing the huge structure. A Y-shaped road can be constructed in the area. We appeal to save the structure even if Rangs has to make due compensation."

Although the office spaces up to the 5th floor were to be kept intact, authorities disconnected electricity, gas and water supply to those floors where the staff had to work all day long yesterday, Mahbuba Islam, Deputy Manager of Ranks Tel, told the press briefing.

"We went to the local police station to file a general diary seeking security for the valuables that remained in the six floors, but police refused to record it," she said.

Head of Enterprise Business Development at Ranks IT Ltd Zia Uddin Pasha said due to hasty moves of some Rajuk officials, thousands of subscribers and clients of Rangs Group had to suffer. This could be easily averted if three more days were given to shift their offices, he said.

"During the flood last year we donated a portion of our salary to help the destitute, but now we need donation as our job here has become uncertain," said Halim, who has been working with Rangs Group since 1989.

Bashundhara

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February. The house is entitled to Shah Alam's wife Afroza Begum, also the managing director of Bashundhara Group.

"The properties were seized following the court order and a report will be submitted to the court by August 6," SI Rezaul said.

Judge Mohammad Azizul Haq of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the attachment order on July 31.

The same court on July 25 issued arrest warrants against seven, after Kabiruddin Mollah, deputy tax commissioner of Circle-8 filed a case for evading Tk 8.48 crore income tax between the financial years 2003-04 and 2006-07.

The accused are Bashundhara Industrial Complex Ltd, Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan Shah Alam, wife Afroza Begum, their sons -- directors Saadat Sobhan, Safayet Sobhan and Sayem Sobhan, deputy director Mostafizur Rahman and MM Kuddus, proprietor of Kuddus & Company.

In the complaint, Kabir said that Shah Alam and others repeatedly gave false information to the income tax department about their real income and expenditure and evaded the huge amount of tax.

Manpower export

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demand has to be purchased from foreign agents or employers. The situation is not unique for Bangladesh, rather it's global," said an expert.

For example, each worker going to Malaysia spends around Tk 2 lakh, he said. But the amount spent in Bangladesh for airfare, documentation fee, recruiting agents' fee and even the fee for the brokers, is only around Tk 1 lakh.

The rest is spent in Malaysia for paying the outsourcing companies and other authorities (grey area), business insiders noted.

"The money spent in Malaysia is sent through hundi," an agent said. If the government had a mechanism of allowing recruiting agents a foreign currency quota as per their annual performances, it would add value to the services they provide in placing workers overseas.

A fact-finding mission of a human rights organisation in Malaysia, Tenaganita, in its recent report also revealed the anomalies. It said each Bangladeshi worker has to pay around Tk 1 lakh to various government and non-government authorities in Malaysia for collecting job demand letters, their approvals and other documentation.

These agencies include the sub-agents who lobby the outsourcing companies, their officials and even some officials of the home ministry of Malaysia, the report noted.

In the case of the Middle Eastern countries, it is a well-known fact that there exists a visa trading system. Either the recruiting agencies or the individual brokers buy visas from the agencies of those countries or employers at Tk 50,000 to Tk 1.5 lakh.

"The amount paid by Bangladeshi brokers for visas is more than that by many other manpower exporting countries as Bangladeshi workers have more demand of jobs," said another recruiting agent. The system remains widely "whether we want it or not", the agent added.

Upon realisation of such realities, Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) in 1996 asked the government to allocate a foreign currency quota to the agencies.

The Ministry of Labour and Manpower then also held a meeting attended by the officials from the ministries of finance, foreign affairs, labour and manpower, Bangladesh Bank, Export Promotion Bureau, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and the Baira.

The meeting felt that the government should consider the issue, as the agencies need foreign currency to buy job demand letters and explore job markets. But the matter was not pursued anymore.

As approached by the Baira following the meeting, Bangladesh Bank also agreed

to allocate a lump-sum amount of \$10,000 to each agent. But the recruiting agencies' association disagreed to it, saying the performance of the agencies varies greatly from one to another. Since then, the matter is gathering dust.

"This is very shocking," said a recruiting agent, adding that transparency could be established in financial transaction process of manpower business provided that the agencies are allocated foreign currency quota based on their performances. The BMET that documents the number of workers the agencies send could monitor and certify the performances.

"Once the foreign currency is allocated to the agencies, they will be accountable to the government on their expenditure of the foreign currency," said another manpower agent asking not to be named.

For example, the government had initiated an investigation to find out why migration cost became high in the case of Malaysia. But the move did not succeed, as their financial transaction was not documented, the agent noted.

The government allowed a state-owned recruiting agency, Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL), to pay \$5,000 as commission to FeximCo Canada Inc, a Canadian company for employing each Bangladeshi worker in Canada.

"If a government agency is allowed to pay commission, why not the private agencies, which recruit more than 30 percent of the workers, while the BOESL recruits less than one percent," an agent questioned.

Army chief

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stricken people.

General Moeen, whose force is engaged in helping the civil administration under the caretaker government, urged all to work together in facing this natural disaster.

Pointing finger to those only offering sermons but sitting idle at this hour of humanitarian crisis, particularly a section of intellectual-politicians. "Come to the affected areas refraining from giving suggestions from Sonargaon Hotel. See how people have been in abject suffering," he said.

Local elite, Deputy Commissioner Md Ataur Rahman, Major Gen Md Ashabuddin, commander of army camp Lt Col Fakhrul Hasan, police superintendent, high civil and military officials and NGO representatives were present at the meeting.

The army chief also distributed relief among the flood victims at various places in Shibhalaya upazila.

Deluge damages

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flood control embankment covering these areas, the sources said.

Floods destroyed about 45 kilometres of the embankments completely and 308 kilometres partially, WDB sources said adding that the total damage is worth Tk 90 crore.

With water still flowing above the danger level in 20 rivers, the overall flood situation is deteriorating further, the sources said.

Huge pressure of flood water and wave action hit the embankments leaving those damaged, AK Azad, chief monitoring officer, WDB told The Daily Star, adding, "We are trying to protect the embankments from the wave action and slope damage by using sand bags and piling."

About the city's unprotected areas, another WDB official said that some parts of the city's eastern area including Basabo, Khilgaon, Goran, Banasri and Badda are exposed to flood threats, as there is no embankment for these areas. These areas of the capital were hit by

floods in 1988 and 2004, he added.

"To protect these areas from flooding, WDB proposed building an embankment under eastern embankment cum by-pass project at a cost of Tk 2,750 crore," the official said adding that the development project proforma (DPP) is now at the planning commission for review.

Water of the Someswari river at Durgapur flows 180 cm above the danger level, which is the highest among all the rivers.

The other rivers flowing above the danger mark are Kangsha (117 cm), Dhara (73 cm), Brahmputra at Chilmar (81 cm), Brahmputra at Noonkhava (61 cm), Jamuna at Bahadurabad (84 cm) Jamuna at Sirajganj and Aricha (99 and 85 cm), Dhaleswari (25 cm), Padma at Goalundo and Bhagyakul (105 and 66 cm) and Surma at Kanaighat, Sylhet and Sunamganj (111, 27 and 61 cm).

The two new rivers that have crossed the danger mark are Meghna (5 cm) and Old Brahmputra (4 cm), WDB sources said.

22 services identified

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show his national identity card to apply for having facilities and services or to sign an agreement," said the draft, which was finalised by the National Steering Committee led by the CEC for preparing the voter list with photographs and NID.

People who are now not eligible to be registered as voters will have to wait for an indefinite time to get the cards as the EC did not take the responsibilities of preparing and issuing the NIDs to them.

The EC however proposed a provision authorising the government to relax the stringent conditions for the usage of the NIDs.

"The government will be authorised to exempt citizens of a particular range of ages from the compliance of the law. It can also exempt a particular section of people from compliance of the law to have the government services and facilities. Even the government can relax the provisions for showing the cards mandatory to have some facilities," the draft law says.

The draft law also proposed making a provision for punishment with a maximum of six years imprisonment and a fine up to Tk 50,000 for providing false information to have the NIDs or misuse of the cards.

Regarding enforcement of the law, if it is made, the government will have to complete a massive task to change many of its official procedures and it may require a long time costing a good amount of money, information technology experts said.

Sister claims

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complications," Khushi Kabir said in the release adding that in 2006 her sister underwent a surgery in National University Hospital in Singapore.

She still has a blockage in an artery, which has been clearly documented in the medical report sent by the hospital in Singapore. Moreover, specialist physicians asked her to be under regular check ups. She also has a heart condition known as arrhythmia which causes irregular heart beat and breathlessness in a patient. Besides, due to her diabetes 48 percent of Sigma's kidneys are damaged, Khushi Kabir said.

Following her doctors' advice Sigma was making arrangements to travel to Singapore for check ups, but since the government had put a ban on her trip abroad, she was admitted to Lab Aid Cardiac Hospital in the capital for medical tests including an angiogram. She was still asked to be present in a court in that complicated situation, prompting the doctors to send her to the court by an ambulance on a stretcher with artificial oxygen supply. Her family sent her medical report to the jail authorities and apprised them of her health condition, the news release said.

Only after eminent women leaders and Amnesty International had expressed their concern about Sigma's health, the jail authorities called in a doctor to see her. But the authorities did not keep any medical report from the doctor. Following Sigma's request, the prison doctor visited her twice or three times, said Sigma's sister.

As the jail authorities declined to provide her with an ambulance and a wheel chair even though she was suffering from spinal and limb complications, her family had no choice but to arrange those amenities for her, Khushi Kabir said in the release.

Since July 7, the authorities have not arranged for any type of medical test for Sigma, the release claimed.

The release went on saying that Sigma's family cannot really understand how the jail authorities claimed that her condition is not critical while her condition is not only visibly bad but deteriorating. Khushi Kabir in her statement hoped that the jail authorities will dispel the 'confusion' created by themselves, by making public the medical reports of Sigma.

Sigma's sister also said their family has a history of suffering from similar ailments. Sigma's elder sister Alfa Ali died of similar complications before she could even consult a doctor, Khushi Kabir added.

Sigma Huda's husband is also currently in jail on charges of corruption.

Khaleda

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by his client, Ahmed Aazam Khan, Khaleda's lawyer, told UNB, "This is an inevitable consequence."

On the other hand, Barrister Fazle Noor Tapash, lawyer for former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, said they will initiate a legal process if they do not get the reply from the ACC by the deadline, 10:00am today.

Replying to a question, he told the UNB, "A writ petition with the High Court challenging the legality of the notice may be filed tomorrow (Sunday)."

To a query, Barrister Tapash said the ACC did not communicate with him after receiving the legal notice on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, Hasina sent a legal notice to the ACC through her lawyer, questioning the legality of the notice directing her to submit wealth statement.

Her legal notice asked the commission to reply by Sunday (today) at 10:00am, failing which legal actions will be taken.

It was claimed in the legal notice that a deputy director of the commission cannot issue such a notice to a former prime minister, rather the commission itself should have done that.

Mirza Aziz

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the supply of commodities, the adviser said. Floods are having an adverse impact on inflation, he added.

The adviser however said the government has enough relief materials and resources to help the flood-affected people.

Phuket scraps

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"Officials of a European airlines are likely to visit Dhaka to talk about leasing out aircraft to Biman," said the source.

Communications Adviser Maj Gen (rtd) MA Matin earlier told the journalists that the government had selected Phuket Airlines for carrying the hajj pilgrims. He said that Phuket was selected out of seven airlines that participated in the tender.

A highly placed source said that the Thai airline demanded more money in advance violating the agreement between Biman and Phuket Air.

"As per the agreement, the national flag carrier had to pay 10 percent of the total money in advance but the Thai airlines was demanding 30 percent," the source said.

"Since Phuket is not financially solvent at present it demanded 30 percent of the total money in advance for D-check (aircraft maintenance check) of their aircraft," said the Biman official.

The Biman official hoped that the hajj flights would be operated in due time, which is usually a month before Eid.

CPD expert group

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levels need to be immediately activated, the experts suggested.

"The government needs to mobilise development NGOs, community based organisations (CBOs), private sector bodies and concerned individual citizens and development partners towards relief activities. Local administration needs to gear up its initiating and coordinating role in this regard," said a CPD press statement on the consultation.

It also said the government machinery should be fully geared to initiate the vulnerable group feeding (VGF) and vulnerable group development (VGD) activities programmed under the annual development programme (ADP) on a priority basis in flood affected areas.

The consultation was held in CPD's dialogue room. The meeting was called to discuss the state of affairs in the context of the ongoing flood in the country and the possible consequences in terms of relief and rehabilitation activities.

The meeting focused on food stock and food security, probable damage to aman crop and its rehabilitation, activation of the private sector for food import and distribution, and involvement of non-government and community based organisations in relief and rehabilitation work, according to the press statement.

Chaired by Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of CPD, the meeting was attended by Dr Saadat Husain, chairman of the Public Service Commission, M Syeduzzaman, former finance minister, Syed Manzur Elahi, former adviser to a caretaker government, Abdul Muey Chowdhury, former adviser to a caretaker government, Dr Mahabub Hossain, executive director of BRAC, M Aminuzzaman, president of the Bankers' Association of Bangladesh, Dr Z Karim, former secretary to the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Dr Quazi Shahabuddin, director general of BIDS, Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, former deputy governor of the Bangladesh Bank, Dr Aunur Nishat, country representative of IUCN, Prof Abu Ahmed of Dhaka University, Fazlul Haque, president of BKMEA, Dr Mustafa Mujeri,

professorial fellow at BIDS, Dr Rushidan Islam Rahman, research director of BIDS, Dr Sajjad Zohir, executive director of ERG, Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of CPD, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, research director of CPD, Fatema Yousuf, senior director of CPD, Dr Uttam Deb, senior research fellow of CPD, and Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research fellow of CPD.

The government may consider an appeal to all interested citizens and organisations to donate to the chief adviser's relief fund, the meeting said adding that the government may also invite international donor funding towards relief and rehabilitation activities. NGOs may be encouraged to tap into their international networks to generate resources for the purpose, said the discussants.

They observed that the government has to notify the public about public food stock and its distribution status in different thanas and districts, and monitor that on a daily basis to instil confidence among the citizens. Such public notifications should be readily available in real time to the general public, they added.

The food security situation needs to be viewed in the context of rising prices in global and regional markets, the current level of food stock and what is in the pipeline, and the possibility of a prolonged flood, the meeting recommended.

"Energetic steps should be taken to encourage private food grain importers to open letters of credit and to facilitate border measures. The government may like to sit with potential importers and leading bankers to address this issue urgently," said the press statement.

For agriculture rehabilitation activities, the meeting suggested that the government should have a coordinated initiative, particularly involving private sector banks to enhance inflow of rural credit along with specialised government banks.

The discussants also stressed that the government should take appropriate security and safety measures to safeguard the marooned people and their properties.

AL, BNP leaders say

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BBC Bangla Service in collaboration with the BBC World Service Trust at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain on Thursday said that the interim government might fail as they are not getting enough support from intellectuals and the media. He also sought cooperation from all so that the government succeeds.

"Why should we take the responsibilities, if they fail?" Hannan Shah posed a question.

AL leader Manna said none of the previous governments in country's history came to power receiving overwhelming people's support like the incumbent caretaker government. If it fails, why should people take the responsibilities of their failure, said the AL leader adding that the law adviser should make public what he wanted to indicate.

"The Law Adviser realised that the current government is going to fail for their fiasco in checking the price of essentials, handling of the flood situation across the country and fall in public support following their misuse of power," said human rights activist and lawyer Tarana Halim.

Dr Aunur Nishat, country representative of international environmental group IUCN took part in the Sanglap as panellist while Shakeel Anwar of BBC Bangla Service moderated the programme produced by Waliur Rahman Miraz.

The panel members said all the advisers should submit their wealth statements to the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) to prove them clean. They said only the political governments should not be blamed for corruption carried out in last 36 years as the country remained under military regimes for 18 years since its independence.

While replying to a question why

the political parties are not coming forward to help the flood-affected people, both the leaders of BNP and AL mentioned the ban on indoor politics as the main reason.

If the caretaker government allows the political activists to get united under their respective party banners, it would be easier for them to come forward to help the flood-affected people, they said adding that they are helping the flood victims individually.

Dr Aunur said it is the responsibility of the state, not political parties to help the flood-affected people.

Both Hannan and Manna pledged that they would protect country's s'ute industry, if they are voted to power in future adding that the workers of the closed jute mills should be given jobs, dues.

Suicide car bomb

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were still in critical condition, he said.

In the other attack Saturday, pro-Taliban militants assaulted a security checkpoint in Oblanki, a remote area of the North Waziristan tribal region, triggering a shootout that killed four soldiers and 10 militants, officials said. Five other soldiers were wounded, said army spokesman Maj Gen Waheed Arshad.

The security situation in Pakistan, especially in the tribal zone bordering Afghanistan, has been deteriorating for weeks, and almost daily attacks have killed more than 300 people.

Pakistan is a key ally of the United States in its war on terror, and it has deployed about 90,000 soldiers in its tribal regions since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to flush out remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, who are believed to be hiding there.

President Gen. Pervez Musharraf is under increasing pressure from Washington to crack down in the tribal region.

The surge in violence has followed tribal leaders' withdrawal from a 2006 peace deal with the government, and amid widespread anger at an army raid of Islamabad's radical Red Mosque last month that left at least 102 people dead.

Arshad said Saturday's gunbattle raged for two hours and ended when the militants fled to nearby mountains with some of the bodies of slain associates.

A local intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to media, said the assailants shouted "God is great" and used rockets, assault rifles and other munitions to target the checkpoint.

Two helicopter gunships were used to pursue the fleeing fighters, he said.

Separately, militants fired eight rockets at a security checkpoint near Miran Shah, the main town in North Waziristan, but caused no damage or casualties, the official said.

Pakistan used to be a main supporter of Afghanistan's former Taliban regime, but Musharraf switched sides after the attacks in the US. He has since said that his fight against terrorism would continue until it is reasonably assured that militancy, extremism and terrorism have been defeated.