

Millions grapple

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Rajbari, Madaripur and Shariatpur, and Dohar and Nawabganj upazilas of Dhaka are likely to start improving and the improvement will continue for at least next three days.

The water level of the Meghna at Bhairab Bazar is likely to fall further and the flood situation in Narsingdi, Brahmanbaria, Kishoreganj and Gazipur is also likely to start improving for at least the next three days.

At least three children drowned in Keraniganj and Nawabganj, while two others died of snakebites in Dhaka district.

Meanwhile, even though 21 flood shelters have been set up at Nawabganj, Keraniganj, Dohar, Dhamrai and Tejgaon for the flood-affected people of Khilgaon, Badda, Merul Badda, Nondipara and Trimohini, the government has not started operating those shelters yet.

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) in a press release yesterday said it started supplying drinking water in the affected areas of the city in plastic tanks, liquid containers and vehicles. It also opened a round the clock complaint centre (phone: 9358192).

Our correspondent in Kishoreganj reports: Ten people drowned and two were missing after a boat capsized in a haor of Bajitpur upazila Monday evening.

Eight of the dead were identified as Shanjida, 6, Sraban Das, 7, Shankor Das, 6, Paruli, 70, Roshmoni, 55, Jatindra Das, 55, Jhontu Das, 30, and Nayan Das, 8. They were all residents of Nayakandi of Bajitpur.

Sub-inspector Salahuddin of Bajitpur Police Station said the boat carrying 16 people to Nayakandi from Hilochia Bazar capsized near Hilochia Bazar due to stormy weather.

Two children died in another boat-capsize incident at Katiadi upazila Monday evening. They were identified Sumaiya, 3, and Rocky, 1.

However, the flood control room reported that eight people died in 24 hours ending at 11:00am yesterday, raising the death toll to 164. A total of 91 lakh people were affected in 38 districts. The government opened 1,515 flood shelters, which are now home to 3.6 lakh people.

Our correspondent in Gaibandha reports: About 400 people were diagnosed with diarrhoea in the district yesterday, raising the total number to 1,270, according to district civil surgeon office sources.

"We have adequate drugs to combat the spread of diarrhoea and we formed 29 additional medical teams for the flood-affected upazilas," said Dr Shamsul Huq, Civil Surgeon of Gaibandha.

According to district Agriculture Extension Department, flood damaged seedbeds of aman on 6,280 hectares, transplanted seedlings on 16,925 hectares, vegetables on 2,250 hectares, jute planted on 7,760 hectares. The flood-damage to agriculture is worth over Tk 15 crores.

Our correspondent in Netrakona reports: Diarrhoea is becoming an epidemic in the flood-affected areas. Only 159 diarrhoea patients were admitted to hospitals out of at least 800 people infected with diarrhoea, district administration sources said.

A seven-month-old child died of diarrhoea Monday night at Udaypur under Khaliajuri upazila, Khaliajuri Upazila Health Complex sources said. Scarcity of diarrhoea saline is also hampering the treatment of diarrhoea patients, the sources said.

Our correspondent in Sirajganj reports: District administration officials said the damage to property, infrastructure and crops could be

worth over Tk 100 crore.

A correspondent in Faridpur reports: Two children drowned in floodwater at Nagarkanda upazila in two days, raising the death toll in the district to nine.

Water-borne diseases are spreading fast. Around 62 government medical teams and a six-member army medical team are working to stop the spreading.

Law and Information Adviser Mainul Hossain yesterday visited the flood-affected areas of Faridpur and inquired about relief operations. He distributed relief at a relief-distribution programme organised by Faridpur Development Agency at C&B Ghat near the town.

Our correspondent in Tangail reports: According to Agriculture Extension Department (AED) officials, crops and vegetables on 95,423 hectares of land in 12 upazilas, worth Tk 100 crore, were completely destroyed in the floods.

Our correspondent in Magura reports: Acute crisis of drinking water is prevailing in 65 flood-affected villages of Magura Sadar and Shalikhla upazilas, while inundation of grazing fields is causing a crisis of fodder.

Our staff correspondent in Bogra reports: The government-allocated relief materials remain undistributed at Sariakandi, Sonatala, Dhunat and Sherpur upazilas of Bogra, said an official of District Relief and Rehabilitation Department.

A total of 350 tonnes of rice was allocated for these four upazilas; only 206 tonnes have been distributed so far. A total of Tk 5 lakh was allocated but only Tk 1.9 lakh was distributed.

Bogra Deputy Commissioner Humayun Kabir said the government is distributing relief slowly as many NGOs have started distributing relief goods. "The relief distribution activities will continue for one more month in the affected areas," he added.

A correspondent in Comilla reports: At least three boys drowned in floodwaters at Daudkandi and Titas upazila Monday evening. The victims were identified as Nazrul, 3, Zakaria, 7, and Rahman, 3.

A correspondent in Munshiganj reports: Three children—Ima Akhter, seven-month-old, of Tongibari, Manjida, 12, and Rian, 2, of Sirajdikhan upazilas—died in floodwaters yesterday.

Our correspondent in Chandpur reports: Two children drowned in floodwaters at Haziganj upazila. Flooding in the district affected over 2.3 lakh people.

9 US troops

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attack in the restive town north of Baghdad.

Thousands of US and Iraqi forces have been pressing a massive assault in Diyala, one of the country's deadliest regions, and its provincial capital Baquba since June in a bid to flush out al-Qaeda-linked militants.

US forces claim to have killed and captured dozens of militants, but senior commanders have said that most of the top al-Qaeda leaders in the area fled before the assault began.

The US military said that another American soldier was killed and two others were wounded in an eastern part of the war-torn Iraq capital on Sunday.

The latest deaths took US losses in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion to 3,670, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

At least 19 soldiers have been killed in August.

Advocate Rezak Khan, counsel for Shahriar, however did not seek adjournment, and seemed prepared.

Nurul Islam read out 113 pages from the HC judgement till 1:00 pm.

The court said this will continue today (Wednesday).

Justice Tafazzal noted that the court will take time in the hearing. In the meantime, the parties should complete appointing their lawyers.

Meanwhile, Barrister Abdullah Al Mamun introduced himself as counsel for AKM Mohiuddin. Earlier, the government had appointed Khan Saifur Rahman as his counsel but the court was not possible for him to put up all the records now.

Tafazzal then said, "At least read the leave petition. We will go slow. But let us start. Everybody knows that the case will resume on August 7." The counsel submitted that he could not make adequate preparation and that this was not a deliberate act.

Interestingly, Deputy Attorney General Syed Haider Ali, the state counsel in the case, did not oppose the plea for adjournment. He did not play any role in the proceedings yesterday. Rather, former special prosecutor in this case advocate Anisul Haq was seen helping the court in correcting information.

When the court asked the counsels not to waste time arguing for adjournment and to start reading out leave to appeal prayers or copy of the HC judgement, the five counsels appeared not to have any paper book (history of the case) with them.

Seemingly irritated at such callousness, the judges asked the bench officials to provide the counsels with the paper books. They were given these documents at 9.45 am. The court then asked Huda's counsel Nurul Islam to start reading out the HC verdict that was pronounced by Justice Ruhul Amin.

Largest known planet found

BBC ONLINE

An international team of astronomers has discovered the largest known planet orbiting another star. The "transiting" planet - meaning one that passes in front of its parent star as seen from Earth - is about 70 percent larger than Jupiter.

But the presumed "gas giant" has a much lower mass than Jupiter - the biggest planet in our Solar System - making it of extremely low density.

Details of the work are to appear in the *Astrophysical Journal*.

The new exoplanet, called TrES-4, is located in the constellation of Hercules and was discovered by a team working on the Transatlantic Exoplanet Survey (TrES).

TrES-4 circles the star GSC02620-00648, which lies about 1,435 light-years away from Earth. Being only about seven million km (4.5 million miles) from its parent star, the planet is also very hot, about 1,327C (1,600K; 2,300F).

Because of the relatively weak pull exerted by TrES-4 on its upper atmosphere, some of the atmosphere probably escapes in a curved comet-like tail.

"TrES-4 is the largest known exoplanet," said lead author Georgi Mandushev, from the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, US.

It is so big, in fact, that its size is difficult to explain using current theories about superheated giant planets.

"We continue to be surprised by how relatively large these giant planets can be," says Francis O'Donovan, a graduate student in astronomy at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) which operates one of the TrES telescopes.

"But if we can explain the sizes of these bloated planets in their harsh environments, it may help us better understand our own Solar System planets and their formation."

Its density of 0.2 grams per cubic centimetre is so low that the planet would, in theory, float on water.

By definition, a transiting planet passes directly between the Earth and the star, blocking some of the star's light and causing a slight drop in its brightness.

Peoples Jute Mill

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Khulna to oversee the process.

The deputy commissioner of Khulna and members of Joint Forces and Rab were asked to provide necessary help to the authorities. DC S M Feroze Alam was present when cheques were handed over to the retrenched workers.

A four-member BJMC team has been formed to check whether there is any discrepancy in the payment of dues.

People's Jute Mills Project Director Habibur Rahman said Tk 1.2 crore would be required for the payment of dues of 650 workers.

Meanwhile, 2,047 workers of state-owned Star Jute Mills continued to observe work stoppage for the third consecutive day Tuesday demanding payment of dues.

Production of the mill remained suspended from Sunday due to the work stoppage.

Star Jute Mills Workers' Union President Molla Abdus Sattar said the workers had been demanding payment of dues and other benefits including gratuity.

UN warns

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and Nepal is amplified by the difficulty in airlifting vital clean water supplies to such huge numbers of people, they added.

"Entire villages are days away from a health crisis if people are not reached in the coming days," UNicef's health chief in India, Marzio Babille, said in a statement.

"Children who make up 40 percent of South Asia's population, are particularly susceptible," he added.

The UN agencies said water sources in the affected areas are either contaminated or still submerged more than a week into the flooding caused by exceptionally heavy monsoon rains. Many people were relying on drinking dirty surface water.

"It's the distribution of drinking water that's a problem, you can't airdrop plastic bottles of water," UNicef spokeswoman Veronique Taveau told journalists.

"Airlifts are probably the only way to reach people at the moment. This is what is crucial to organise at this very moment," she added. National authorities have been ferrying supplies to remote communities by helicopter.

The WHO said it had been informed about outbreaks of diarrhoeal illnesses in recent days and warned of the need to maintain surveillance for waterborne diseases.

"We know that these are the biggest killers in such situations," said WHO spokeswoman Fadela Chaib.

India is the worst affected country, with some 20 million people in Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh states hit by flooding and often forced to flee to higher ground, according to the UN agencies.

Some eight million people are affected in Bangladesh and another 300,000 people in southern Nepal, the UN said.

Hasina's appeals

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against her in connection with setting up Meghnaghat power plant will also be held today, the schedule of which was made much earlier.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed, the new counsel of Hasina, filed a prayer seeking a week to prepare himself for the appeal hearings in connection with the frigate and Mig 29 cases, but the court scheduled today as the date for the hearings.

A High Court bench comprised of two judges, Nazrul Islam Chowdhury and Ataur Rahman, adjourned the hearings following the appeal from Shafique.

Earlier, former counsel of Hasina in the cases Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud withdrew himself from the cases and sent back the case files to his client, prompting the former premier to appoint Shafique as her new counsel.

Shafique said in the court that he had been appointed as the new counsel in the cases and a week is required for him to be prepared for the hearings.

The court turned down his request saying a week had been taken earlier by the former counsel of the defendant showing the same cause.

Deputy attorney general of the prosecution, Abdur Rouf Miah, however said a day could be allowed.

The court finally deferred the hearings for a day.

Hasina gets bail

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case, however, will not secure for the detained former prime minister release as the Supreme Court (SC) has meantime stayed the previous HC order allowing her bail in the extortion case filed by Azam J Chowdhury.

The HC's ad interim bail to Hasina and direction for the government not to have the case filed by Noor Ali to be under the Emergency Power Rules, 2007 will remain put off till disposal of the rule in this regard.

Earlier on July 16, the joint forces arrested her and a magistrate court sent her to a house designated as a sub-jail in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex.

NOORALICASE Noor Ali, managing director of Unique Group of Companies, has filed the case accusing Hasina and her two relatives of receiving Tk 5 crore for helping his firm win a power plant deal in 1997.

The government on July 16 put the case under the emergency rules, and a magistrate court on July 29 ordered for Hasina to be shown arrested on the charge.

Despite the HC direction and rule in favour of Hasina's plea filed on Sunday, the other proceedings of the case will remain effective. The investigators will continue their job without employing any section of the emergency power rules.

A week back, Hasina filed another writ petition challenging the government move to bring a Tk 3 crore extortion case filed against her under the emergency rules. She obtained an ad interim bail from the HC but the apex court gave the government a stay of execution till August 14.

STAYONACCORDER A day after her arrest, Hasina was served a notice by the ACC asking her to declare wealth within seven days' time since receipt.

The ACC gave her seven more days for turning in the statement following her prayer for an extension of the time limit that ends today.

The AL president on August 5 filed a writ petition with the HC challenging legality of the ACC order. Yesterday's ruling means now she is not obliged to submit her wealth statement by today. Execution of the anti-graft body's direction will remain halted till the HC rule is disposed of.

The ACC secretary yesterday told reporters that the commission would file an appeal with the Appellate Division of the SC after receiving a

Gang leader

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intersection in the capital for a target with two CNG-run auto-rickshaws.

An aged man, who got down from a bus of Hanif Paribahan from Kushtia, hired one of our auto-rickshaws, said the gang leader.

Eskan and Ibrahim forcibly got into that auto-rickshaw while he, Selim and Badal followed them with the other one, he said.

Faruq also admitted that the victim fell sick after there was a jostle between them and the victim.

They later pushed Atiar out of the auto-rickshaw on a road near the NAM flats at Mirpur-13.

On information from Faruq, police later arrested Selim from Kharki area in Jessore.

Deputy Commissioner of Mirpur Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Anwar Hossain said though primarily there was no clue to the murder, they started massive raids in search for 'malam party' and arrested a number of thugs.

After quizzing them, they came to know that Faruq and his other gang members were active at Technical area on the day the NSI official was killed, Anwar said.

"From that information we arrested Faruq and he has confessed to his involvement in the killing," Anwar told The Daily Star yesterday.

An officer of the now defunct Bureau of Anti-corruption, Abdullah Al Zahid, filed a case on December 11, 2001 with Tejgaon police station accusing five including Sheikh Hasina of corruption in purchasing eight Mig-29s. The complainant in the first information report said Hasina during the regime under her premiership in 1999 bought eight Mig-29s causing a loss of about Tk 700 crore for the state.

The charge sheet in the case was submitted against seven persons on January 29, 2003. The High Court stayed the proceedings of the case after Hasina had appealed for quashing the case the same year.

Another Bureau of Anti-corruption official, Joynul Abedin, filed another case with Tejgaon police station on August 7, 2002 accusing five including Hasina in connection with graft in purchasing a frigate. The complainant brought an allegation that the accused caused a loss of Tk 447 crore for the state in the purchase.

The charge sheet in the case was submitted on August 3, 2003. The High Court stayed the proceedings of this case also as Hasina had appealed for quashing the case the same year.

copy of the court order. Barrister Rafique-ul Huq assisted by Mahbub Alam, former law minister Abdull Matin Khasru, Shahara Khatun, Rahmat Ali, and Sheikh Fazole Noor among others moved both the petitions for Hasina.

INTERNATIONAL LAWYER The AL on Monday appointed Payam Akhavan, a Canadian law professor and a prominent human rights lawyer, as its international counsel to defend Hasina.

At a press conference in London the same day, Akhavan termed the cases filed against the AL president a "travesty of justice".

"Our message to Bangladesh government is that we will not allow this travesty of justice to go unchallenged," he observed.

AL REACTION The AL yesterday halted the HC ruling granting its chief bail and staying the operation of the ACC notice.

Talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence, the party's acting president Zillur Rahman described the court order as a victory of truth.

He said they hope the same would happen to all the "false cases" filed against her.

Hasina's wealth

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with two cases on charges of extortion of Tk 8 crore, yesterday signed her three-page wealth statement which said that she has properties worth about Tk 2 crore.

"She kept it with her and will submit to the ACC through the jail authorities," he said adding that the AL chief was not aware of the High Court's stay order when she signed the statement.

The lawyer said he prepared the wealth statement evaluating previous year's financial records of Hasina as the ACC and Bangladesh Bank did not cooperate in getting wealth accounts of the AL chief. He also said all the documents were seized from her house on July 16.

Moniruzzaman said Hasina's assets include two jeeps, lands in Tungipara and a jute storage in Khulna. He added that Hasina has eight accounts in three banks and has no liability or illegal wealth.

He said Hasina was eager to meet her ailing husband Dr Wajed Miah, who has been undergoing treatment since she was arrested. The AL president would meet her husband after getting positive response from the government following her appeal.

He also said that Hasina didn't have the real picture of the current flood situation, as she is not permitted to watch other TV channels except state-owned BTV.

"When I informed her about the flood situation across the country, she expressed her grave concern and urged party activists to help the flood victims," he added.

Later Lutfar called Nurunnabi and asked him to withdraw his shares and claims from the business. He told Nurunnabi that Minu and Tarique had asked him to tell Nurunnabi to pull out.

Lutfar threatened to kill Nurunnabi as he refused to pull out of the business. Lutfar on October 19, 2004 called Nurunnabi to his Upashahar home in the city and forced him to sign some blank papers, documents and bank cheques as his aides held him at gunpoint, the complainant said.

Lutfar, however, returned Tk 43 lakh but Tk 1 crore still remains unpaid, Nurunnabi added.

In the other case, Nurunnabi alleged that Lutfar demanded Tk 30 lakh for releasing Tk 7.77 crore bank loan, which Nurunnabi had applied for to establish Nigar Cold Storage in Durgapur upazila in 2002.

"As my loan proposal was rejected by the bank, I contacted Rakub Chairman Rizvi Sultan who told me to consult Lutfar," alleged the plaintiff in the case.

On July 15, 2002, Nurunnabi and his relatives provided Lutfar Tk 29.5 lakh at his home and that very day Rakub approved Tk 6.09 crore loan to Nurunnabi.

BB bars trading

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the legal aspects, the Bangladesh Bank will send a show cause notice to AB bank asking it to explain why its shares of IFIC bank should not be confiscated.

According to the BB investigation report, Falu and his associates, and Beximco Group own 13.71 and 12.74 percent shares of IFIC bank respectively, also directly violating the Bank Company Act.

Besides, the central bank also found gross anomalies in the purchase of IFIC shares by former lawmaker Falu through a Malaysian based company.

The report said the process of purchasing the IFIC shares by the Malaysian company, in which Falu is a partner, was totally in violation of the Money Laundering Act.

Flood relief

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Tk 50 lakh, Magura Tk 50 lakh and Jhenaidah Tk 50 lakh.

The adviser said the emergency allocations were given on the basis of percentage of the flood-affected people, severity of the floods and the extent of poverty in the 15 districts.

"This is supplementary allocation and new allocation will be given gradually to other flood-affected districts," he said.

Replying to a question, the adviser said the allocations from the CA's Relief Fund are being sent quickly so that relief operation is not hampered for lack of money.

Various government and private institutions and organisations and individuals have so far donated a total of around Tk 11 crore directly to Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed's Relief and Welfare Fund for the flood victims.

The water levels of Brahmanpura and the Jamuna rivers have fallen remarkably in some parts of the country, particularly Chilmari, Sirajganj and Aricha. However, the water levels of Padma, Meghna and Dhaleshwari as well as some rivers around Dhaka and Narayanganj in the country's central part are increasing slowly.

It has been informed that flood situation in Dhaka and Narayanganj "may deteriorate".

Lt Commander Hassan of the Armed Forces Division and Chief Adviser's Flood Monitoring and Coordination Cell made a presentation on the latest flood situation, casualties, relief operation, river positions and damage to property by the floods.

In the briefing, it was informed that death toll from various flood-related incidents rose to 164 while the flood situation improved in Chuadanga out of 39 affected districts.

Health Secretary AKM Zafarullah, who was present at the briefing, said 2,162 medical teams are working in the flood-affected upazilas and there is adequate stock of necessary medicines.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim and Disaster Management Secretary Dhiraj Malakar were also present at the briefing.

Bangladeshi

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the judge said. "You also had a note on your desk calendar [marked as 'deadline'] on the day the victim was murdered on Nov 4," added the judge.

The judge also ruled out the claim of Shamim Reza's defence that someone else was involved in the murder. "If there was someone else, his or her trace of blood would have been detected," said the judge.

Shamim Reza, an Economics graduate, was convicted of murdering his girlfriend of several years, Zuriyati, a first-year Industrial Chemistry diploma student, between 11:30am and midnight on August 9, 2002. The victim was found dead in her dormitory in Section 2 of Shah Alam City in Malaysia, said a report run by The New Straits Times on August 6.

During the trial, 27 prosecution witnesses were called to testify while Shamim Reza was the only defence witness.

Ex-president

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high-profile political figures like BNP Senior Secretary General Tarique Rahman and Minu.

Ramjan Ali, officer-in-charge of Boalia Police Station, told newsmen that police started investigating the cases. "If other people were found to be involved during the investigation, they will be implicated in the case," he added.

Police sources said there were bits of evidence in the case to suggest Tarique and Minu were involved.

The complainant in a case said Lutfar in June 2004 started a business with Jamuna Seed Storage Pvt Ltd. "Witnessing my success in other businesses, Lutfar invited me to the seed storage business saying that Mayor Minu was also investing money. Lutfar told me that (former) finance minister agreed to help," the plaintiff in the case said.

Nurunnabi started doing business with 40 percent partnership. He had invested Tk 1.43 crore in the business.

He said Lutfar, the then director of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (R