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REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XVII No. 214

DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 19, 2007

People's Right to Know

BHADRA 4, 1414 BS

SABAN 4, 1428 HIJRI

24 PAGES PLUS STAR CAMPUS PRICE: Tk 10.00

www.thedailystar.net

## Tk 2,000cr crops lost in flood

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The devastating floods have damaged crops worth about Tk 2,000 crore in 262 upazilas of the 39 flood-hit districts, according to a preliminary estimate by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

The damaged crops include rice, jute, vegetable and spices on around 4.69 lakh hectares of land, which is about 26 percent of the total cultivated crops in the affected areas.

Production of these crops will now reduce by 16.67 lakh tonnes, said the DAE estimate submitted to the agriculture ministry.

"The crop damage due to flooding will be between Tk 1,800 crore and Tk 2,000 crore. We are collecting information to prepare a final

report on it," Dr Shahidul Islam, director of DAE field service wing, told The Daily Star yesterday.

In such a situation, the government has initiated a Tk 65 crore post-flood rehabilitation programme to rehabilitate the marginal farmers in the affected districts.

The government has already released Tk 30 crore for the programme that will cover seven lakh small and marginal farmers.

Agriculture Adviser Dr CS Karim at a meeting with the DAE officials yesterday directed them to expedite implementation of the rehabilitation programme, sources said.

"Late variety aman rice seedlings and seeds of dry season crops will be distributed among the farmers under this programme. Seedlings of different types of

seasonal rice have been raised on 203.25 hectares to be distributed soon for transplantation. List of beneficiaries of the programme has already been made," a DAE senior official said on condition of anonymity.

The DAE has also initiated measures to motivate other farmers to prepare seedbeds using their preserved seeds and exchange seeds with interested farmers. It is also giving post-flood farming guidelines and conducting campaigns for following those:

These steps are intended to assist farmers to increase productivity using area-specific appropriate agricultural technologies.

The DAE's control rooms at central, district and upazila levels are working to prepare a complete document on flood damage in the

country. It is also trying to update and popularise the post-flood guidelines for farmers.

Aman crop -- both broadcast and transplanted -- is the worst hit in the current floods. This major crop on 2.50 lakh hectares has been damaged, causing a loss of around Tk 1,000 crore as, the DAE assessed.

Vegetables worth Tk 628 crore have been damaged on 52,347 hectares.

The DAE fears crop damage might go up if flood situation in some districts deteriorates again.

Meanwhile, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre yesterday said the flood situation could deteriorate slightly in some districts in the wake of a fresh spell of rainstorm under the impact of the latest depression in a series over the Bay.

## Businesspeople asked to help keep prices at tolerable level

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Governor of Bangladesh Bank yesterday urged the business community to play their part in keeping prices of essentials at a tolerable level.

Reducing interest rates for import of essentials is not enough to restrain the inflation unless the businesspeople come forward willingly to keep the prices of commodities at a tolerable level, said the governor.

"Along with bankers, businesspeople, especially the ones involved with supply of essential goods, should come forward to save the nation from the high inflationary pressures," Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, governor of Bangladesh Bank, told journalists following a programme organised in memory of late Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed by Asiatic Society of

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## FROZEN FOOD EXPORTERS Govt rule ignored to waive Tk 101cr loans

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The finance ministry in violation of a government rule has asked five state-owned banks to waive Tk 101 crore loans taken by 16 frozen food exporters.

However, the banks-- Sonali, Janata, Agrani, Rupali and Krishi-- have not complied with the ministry's instructions yet as they found the order clashes with a rule issued last year by the finance ministry itself.

In June, the finance ministry in a letter conveyed a government decision to the banks about the loans taken by the frozen food exporters, who owe Tk 126 crore to the banks.

The ministry said the defaulters would repay Tk 25.20 crore and 40 percent of the loan equivalent to Tk 50.40 crore will have to be waived by the banks "as per law".

The government will pay back the remaining Tk 50.40 crore by issuing bonds, the letter added.

The ministry argued that the exporters belong to a thrust sector and suffered a huge loss due to price reduction in international market, cyclones, tidal waves, viral attacks on shrimps and political disturbance.

Meanwhile, the banks did not implement the decision yet, as according to a finance ministry rule, a bank cannot waive the principal amount of a loan and the cost of fund.

"Of the total loan, more than Tk 100 crore is principal amount," said a banker adding, "Therefore the banks cannot waive the loan as per the law."

This prompted the banks to hold a meeting with the finance ministry in July. The bank executives told the finance secretary that

they can waive the loans if the letter deleted the words "as per law".

During the meeting, the finance secretary asked the banks to submit the loans' status to the ministry.

"The owner of the banks is the government. If the government waives a loan, we have nothing to say other than that the banks will swallow the losses. And this will prompt other thrust sectors to seek the same type of waiver," viewed a high official of a bank.

Sources said the bankers had protested the move to the finance ministry before the government conveyed its decision to them.

"The government in the past had made the banks waive loans promising that it would subsidise the losses. But in reality, the government never fulfilled its promises," a banker said.

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## ELECTORAL REFORMS

# EC's move for talks stuck in politics ban

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission's (EC) move to hold dialogue with the political parties on electoral reforms early September seems stuck in limbo again with the caretaker government having no plan to lift the ban on indoor politics shortly.

"We have not yet discussed whether the ban should go," an adviser to the caretaker government told The Daily Star yesterday, wishing anonymity. "However, I don't know if the chief adviser has talked with the commission lately in this regard," he added.

In line with its roadmap to the long-stalled ninth parliamentary polls, the EC has already announced that it would start sending out invitations to the political parties at the end of this month.

The commission is determined to push on with its plan no matter what the government decides on the ban. But the major political parties--Awami League (AL) and BNP--have already declared that

they would not sit with the EC as long as the ban remains in force.

In this situation, many fear that the EC's move for dialogue might be delayed once again. Earlier, the commission could not reach the goal it set for itself to talk with the political parties to finalise the reforms process by July.

Talking to The Daily Star, the adviser holding some vital portfolios criticised the AL and BNP for their stance and said the ban on politics has nothing to do with the planned parley with the commission.

"The government won't stop any organisation talking over the proposed electoral reforms with the Election Commission," he observed.

Leaders of the AL and BNP maintain that they would have to hold formal meetings to discuss at party forum the EC's proposals for reforms. But how come they would do that with the ban still in place on indoor politics, they question.

Acting president of AL Zillur Rahman yesterday said it is not possible for them to join the dia-

logue unless the ban is withdrawn. "We will have to discuss the proposals at central working committee meeting but that cannot be done amid the curb on indoor politics," he said.

Adviser to BNP Chairperson Brig Gen (ret) ASM Hannan Shah yesterday echoed Zillur's view and so did BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. Leader of the pro-reform faction within the party, Bhuiyan on Friday said that the restrictions should be lifted for the dialogue to take place.

Unveiling the roadmap on July 15, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said the ban must go to pave the way for talks with the political parties. He said they had drawn up the plans in consultation with the chief adviser.

In the roadmap, the commission said it wants to hold dialogue with the political parties between September and November this year with a view to carrying out necessary reforms by February next year.

Political parties will have to register with the EC by next June if

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DESPERATE FOR RELIEF... Flood victims of all ages frantically row towards a relief carrying boat at Rugganj in Narayanganj yesterday hoping to get some help.

## Govt asked to follow one rule for all political parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government should follow uniform policy to deal with the political parties and politicians to avoid controversy, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

The government is allowing some people to carry on political activities and form new political party though there is ban on political activities, BNP Joint Secretary, General Salima Rahman said at the BBC Bangladesh Sanglap held in the capital.

"The government should follow one rule for all," Salima, also a former state minister, said.

Replying to Khaleda's teleconference, Salima said that talking over telephone is not banned under the emergency and she (Khaleda) is not making any harmful statements rather directing people to help the flood victims.

"Sheikh Hasina should also be given such opportunity so that she can talk with her family members over telephone after amending jail code," the BNP joint secretary general said.

She said, "As the government

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## REFORM TALKS BNP will not respond without party approval

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP will not respond without party approval if the Election Commission (EC) invites it to discuss electoral reforms.

"The party chairperson has not yet taken any decision in this regard. So, it (party) has not finalised the matter," her adviser Brig Gen (ret) ASM Hannan Shah told reporters yesterday during relief operation at Lalbagh and Kamrangir Char in the capital.

He was accompanied by, among others, BNP Vice President Maj Gen (ret) Mir Shawkat Ali Bir Uttam, who submitted resignation to party Chairperson Khaleda Zia a few months ago.

Replying to a question, Hannan said the chairperson did not accept his (Shawkat) resignation. "You may even see him in more responsible party post in future."

Shawkat said reforms in the party will be implemented through discussion after lifting of the ban on politics.

Differences of opinion (intra-party) will not matter as the BNP will continue to remain united, he said when asked about dissident leaders' remarks against the party chief.

BNP is yet to decide its response, Hannan said when it was pointed out that the EC would issue invitation letter to the party secretary general (top pro-reform leader) for participating in dialogue on electoral reforms.

"At district level, they [EC] invited our leaders in Mymensingh but we asked them not to take part in any discussion with them on the

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## City roads or moon craters?

### Traffic system breaks down as no steps taken for emergency repair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The traffic system in Dhaka city has virtually collapsed as numerous potholes and huge craters surfaced on almost all city roads.

Vehicular movement is damaging the roads further and the potholes, created due to heavy rainfall and flooding of the roads, are now turning into craters.

At Uttara alone, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has identified around 180 potholes taking up more than 2766.58 square metres of road surface.

A disappointed Uttara commuter said, "Frequent travellers on this road try to get around the potholes, but others fail to take notice of them quickly enough and end up suddenly running into a nasty crater."

"The city corporation can outline the potholes on billboards at all the major intersections [of the road] if they sincerely want to help us avoid accidents," he suggested.

However, DCC engineers responsible for maintenance of roads in different zones in the city expressed their helplessness under

the prevailing circumstances.

A DCC engineer concerned said, "City commuters are suffering while we are having to face the hard task of repairing almost all roads. The heavy rainfall has washed away the bitumen layer of the roads...the bitumen layer was damaged by accumulated rainwater on the roads due to poor drainage."

Monsur Ahmed, executive engineer of DCC Circle 10, told this correspondent that he had tried in vain to draw attention of the executive engineer of Roads and

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Vehicles trundle on the damaged Badda-Gulshan-1 link road in the capital. Water logging damaged the road recently but lack of repair has left it in this appalling state.

PHOTO: STAR

## Flood to worsen in central region

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Swelling rivers inundated many areas of Gaibandha and Chandpur afresh yesterday while the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) warned likely deterioration of flood situation in the central part of the country.

Fresh areas of four upazilas in Gaibandha were inundated yesterday following rise of water levels of the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Ghagot and Karotoa at all points in the district. Water Development Board sources said.

Water from upstream continued to swell the rivers. New areas of Gaibandha Sadar, Sunderganj,

Shaghata and Fulchari upazilas were flooded while Amon seedlings in low-lying areas, transplanted recently, have gone under floodwaters, our correspondent in Gaibandha reports.

Nine educational institutions were washed away while 63 others were damaged.

A total of 4,236 flood-affected people have been infected with diarrhoea since the flood hit Gaibandha and 71 new patients were admitted yesterday, said Civil Surgeon of Gaibandha. The Chief Adviser's Fund allocated Tk 1 crore for the flood victims of Gaibandha so far.

A correspondent in Chandpur

reports: Many areas of Chandpur Sadar, Haimchar, Matlab, Hajiganj and Kochua upazilas of the district became inundated yesterday. Residents of 25 chars have also become marooned in the fresh floodwaters.

The flood situation is likely to deteriorate in the central part of the country as monsoon seemed vigorously active over the eastern part of Bihar, West Bengal and Sub-Himalayan West Bengal (Ganges basin) and it has turned fairly active over the Brahmaputra and Meghna basins, FFWC sources said yesterday.

The flood situation in the districts of Manikganj, Munshiganj,

Faridpur, Rajbari, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Gopalganj, Chandpur and Dohar and Nawabganj upazilas of Dhaka is likely to deteriorate slightly.

Small rivers surrounding Dhaka and Narayanganj observed rise and fall at different points. The rivers are expected to show this mixed tendency in the next 24-72 hours.

Flood situation around Dhaka city, especially the eastern part, is likely to remain unchanged and then deteriorate slightly in the next 24-72 hours.

Saiful Hossain, chief engineer of FFWC, told The Daily Star, "Due to heavy monsoon rains the rivers

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## UN fears food shortages in flood-hit nations

AFP, New Delhi

Food shortages loom in South Asian nations hit by torrential rains, floods and landslides affecting more than 28 million people, the United Nations said yesterday.

The food situation gives "serious cause for concern" due to loss of animals and unfavourable crop prospects following damage to recently planted crops, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said on its website.

"Opportunities for replanting once the water has fully receded are limited as the sowing period of the main cereal season normally ends in July in India and Bangladesh and by mid-August in Nepal," it said.

In India, where the three worst

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মাসিক কিস্তির মাধ্যমে আপনি এই স্কীম খুলতে পারেন। পাঁচ বছর পর স্কীমের সময় পূর্ণ হলে লাভসহ মোট আমানত আপনি একসাথে নিতে পারেন অথবা পরবর্তী পাঁচ বছর ধরে মাসিক পেনশন -এর আকারে নিতে পারেন। আর ততদিন পর্যন্ত আমরা তো আছি আপনার ভবিষ্যতকে সুরক্ষিত রাখতে।

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