

2 launches

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Meanwhile, shops and factories of the area remained closed yesterday. Traders of the area threatened to go for tougher actions if the pontoons were not removed. They said they would not open their trading houses unless the jetties were reopened.

A three-member committee has been formed to investigate the incidents, said Mahbubul Alam, director (port and transport) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA).

Local businessmen said around 10,000 garment shops at Simpson Road Masjid of South Keraniganj depend mainly on shoppers from the capital. They claimed closure of the mooring would affect their businesses since it would mean hassles for those who come to their markets using the lone pier (gudarghat).

Witnesses said local shop owners and workers flew into a rage as soon as they found out that BIWTA had closed the Simpson Road Masjid Ghat on the other side and set up three pontoons in its place early yesterday.

Police said around 30,000 demonstrators marched on the riverbank opposite Sadarghat by 9:30am. Soon they began throwing projectiles at the launches moored nearby.

At one stage, hundreds of them went on the rampage through the vessels. They set fire to two triple-deckers MV Obhijan-3 and MV Riaz-4.

Firefighters and coastguards rushed to the scene immediately and

tried to douse the flames. But they could do little as the demonstrators kept pelting them with stones.

"A large group of demonstrators got onto my launch and beat me up along with 12 others including five ansars on board," said Abul Kalam Azad, master of MV Obhijan-3.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, he said he and five of his staff dived into the river while the ansars were confined to the launch for about an hour.

Fearing attacks, a good number of launches opted to anchor far off the terminal.

Around 100 policemen were deployed in the area by 10:00am, but they stood as mere onlookers in the face of violent protest by such a mammoth crowd.

Launch owners have accused the law enforcers of inaction.

Superintendent of Police in Dhaka Mahbubur Rahman said had they resorted to tough measures there would have been loss of life and serious injuries.

South Keraniganj police early today told The Daily Star that a case was being lodged in this regard accusing 20,000 to 30,000 unknown people.

Tensions eased at around 11:30am after BIWTA officials had contacted the business leaders over phone and assured them of removing the pontoons set up overnight.

Later, another group of firefighters reached the scene and brought the fire under control at around 1:00pm.

Lankan battles

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bomber in April 2006, told the military commanders that security forces killed 5,000 Tiger cadres last year, the Sunday Times said.

The military had earlier estimated the Tigers' strength between 3,000 and 5,000 combatants and announced at the start of 2008 that they would be able to wipe out the rebels within six months.

According to the military, fighting since January 2008 killed 3,359 rebels and 246 soldiers died during the same period. The figure comes on top of military claims that 2,752 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres were killed in 2007, which would total 6,111 rebels dead in the past 16 months.

Fighting has escalated along the northern front lines since the government withdrew from a long-ignored ceasefire in January.

The Tamil Tigers have been fighting since 1983 for an independent homeland for minority ethnic Tamils, who have been marginalized for decades by governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting.

Amini

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Muhiuddin Khan, senior vice-president of a faction of Islami Oikya Jote, said that his faction was ready to sacrifice anything to press for their demands.

ILIC will hold seminars and meetings at district headquarters to mobilise public support against the NWDIP.

Storm kills 2

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Hospital where he succumbed to his wounds.

The storm damaged standing crops on vast tracts of land. Power supply was also disrupted for hours in the district following the storm.

Meanwhile, Zarina Begum was killed and 10 others were injured as a nor'wester battered Magura at about 8:00pm.

About 500 houses and standing crops on vast tracts of land were damaged in the storm.

Another cyclone

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meeting of experts at the met office.

The cyclone in the Bay, if formed, would be named abc, from a panel of code names selected for the Bay of Bengal cyclones of this year, senior meteorologist and cyclone expert Sujit Kumar Dev Sharma told BSS.

Two to three moderate to severe heat waves (38-42 degrees Celsius) may rage over the northern and central regions, the monthly weather forecast said adding that some other parts of the country may experience mild to moderate heat waves (36-40 degrees Celsius). This month's rainfall is likely to be 10 to 20 percent in excess of average rainfall.

Although the forecast for April had said the rainfall would be 10 percent higher than average, it was actually 78 percent less than the normal average precipitations.

The reason behind this was the absence of mating of westerly and easterly pressures over Bangladesh, experts said.

BTTB

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on May 9, 2007 and November 30, 2007 respectively.

So far, 126 UN member states have signed the UN Convention and 20 countries ratified the convention while optional protocol of the convention was signed by 71 members and ratified by 13.

The meeting approved the BTTB (Amendment) Ordinance 2008 amending some sections of the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board Ordinance 1979. It also okayed Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association.

As per the new ordinance, all types of property of the BTTB will be transferred to a public limited company under provision of the Companies Act. There is also provision for transfer of the submarine cable and land station of the phone board to the public limited company in the making.

BTTB will be abolished after the transfer of all its properties to the up-and-coming company. The amended law provides for absorbing all officials and employees of the BTTB in the jobs under the limited company as per conditions of an agreement to be signed with the public limited company.

A proposal for amending some sections of the Town Improvement Act 1953 to bring dynamism in the management of the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) through necessary overhauling was also placed before the council meeting. The meeting sent it back for further examination.

Members of the advisory council attended the meeting at the CA's office. Cabinet secretary, CA's press secretary and secretaries concerned were also present.

Chittagong Port

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them over a list of undelivered containers.

However, after the 30-day period is over, failure to swiftly auction off the perishable food items causes the foods to either spoil or exceed the date of safe consumption.

A complicated auction procedure coupled with lack of adequate trained human resources and absence of coordination among the government authorities concerned are to blame for the huge waste of the valuable commodities, observed experts.

The failure in conducting the auctions is also causing the government to incur a huge loss in potential revenues, they said.

Containers being held up for a long time by the Bangladesh importers is also causing heavy losses to foreign shipping lines and as a result, many foreign shipping lines are now reluctant in renting out their containers to Bangladesh importers, said a few importers adding that the situation is hurting the country's image.

The situation would not turn so bad if a few commercial banks did not entertain the dishonest practice of 'under or over-invoicing' when opening letters of credit (LC) for importing goods, alleged an importer.

Goods imported through unethical means are often left unclaimed at the port, the importer also said.

However, a few importers denied deliberate delays in claiming their goods at the port and claimed that the unavailability of warehouses suitable for preserving perishable food items is the main reason behind their delays in claim.

Margub Ahmed, commissioner (export) of Chittagong Customs Authority, said, "In most of the cases, the dates of perishable items get expired or these items get damaged before being put on auctions due to the delays caused by writ petitions filed by importers."

Sometimes the delay in handing over the removal list by the port authorities results in delays in the auction process, he added.

However, he did not want to blame the port authorities as they have only one person to prepare the removal list.

SK Gosh, senior vice chairman of Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association (BSAA), said the delay in auction and the long process of container clearance at Chittagong Port causes a loss of around Tk 1 lakh on each container.

When a container is held up at a port for a year, a shipping line on average incurs a loss of \$1,095 in rentals, he said adding that on top of that, a shipping agent now spends around Tk 1,000 to dispose of the expired food items from each unclaimed container.

Urging the authorities concerned to simplify the auctioning process, he thanked the joint forces for taking the initiative to clear the containers from the Chittagong Port. Otherwise, they would have to spend between Tk 20,000 and Tk 25,000 on goods disposal from each container, he said.

Hunger strike

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Metropolitan Police (DMP) imposed a ban on the AL's announced programme terming it 'illegal' under the Emergency Power Rules 2007.

The AL had planned to stage the hunger strike in all districts across the country and all thanas in the capital previously.

Central AL leaderships, members of the party's advisory council, assistant secretaries of the central sub-committees, leaders of Mohila AL and Jubo Mohila League will gather at Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi while leaders of AL Dhaka city unit and other front organisations will assemble at the party central office on Bangabandhu Avenue.

AL chief's political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury, also an organising secretary of the party, told The Daily Star that they would reach the Dhanmondi office before 10:00am and start the programme through addressing the gathering.

Meanwhile, AL and its different front organisations have completed preparations to observe the programme.

"We have asked our thana and ward unit leaders to bring limited number of party men as we won't be able to accommodate a large number of people within the offices and there is no permission to observe the programme on the street," said AL Dhaka City unit Acting General Secretary Qamrul Islam.

AL Acting President Zillur Rahman and Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam in a statement urged all to make the programme a success.

Iraqi first lady unharmed after bombing

AP, Baghdad

A bomb hit a motorcade carrying Iraq's first lady through Baghdad yesterday, while the US military said a roadside explosion killed four Marines in the deadliest attack in western Anbar province in months.

The motorcade bombing in Baghdad's Karrada district injured four of Hiro Ibrahim Ahmed's bodyguards but left her unharmed, according to the office of her husband, President Jalal Talabani.

She was headed to the city's central National Theater to attend a cultural festival when the attack occurred just before noon, said the presidential office. It was unclear if she was the target or if the bombing was random.

The four Marines were killed in Anbar province on Friday, but no other details of the incident were released.

Anbar was once a stronghold for insurgents battling against U.S. forces. But in the past year the vast desert province has largely been calmed with the rise of the Awakening Council movement Sunni fighters who now turn their guns on al-Qaida instead of U.S. forces.

Biman flight

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emergency workers evacuated the passengers from the plane.

An Emirates flight heading for Dhaka had to be diverted to Kolkata and several flights were delayed as the incident halted ZIA for two and a half hours.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd formed two separate enquiry committees in this regard.

"Everything was normal... the aircraft landed safely but the pilot lost control trying to move the aircraft onto the taxiway from the runway," a Biman official told The Daily Star last night.

The aircraft left the taxiway and went onto the soft ground stopping about five to seven feet away from the taxiway," CAAB Chairman Sakeb Iqbal Khan Majlis told The Daily Star.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines formed a seven-member probe committee headed by its Director (customerservice) M Aminul Huq. CAAB formed a three-member committee headed by Wing Commander (flight safety) Kamrul Hasan.

"The passengers were unharmed and there was no damage to the aircraft as its speed was very low," a Biman official said.

Murdered kid

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Locals, however, said the murderer lives in the area.

Ramma police on Thursday afternoon recovered the decomposed body of Jewel, son of rickshaw-puller Alaluddin, and Biplab, son of car driver Siddique Sheikh, from an abandoned house at Noyatola about a kilometre off their houses.

Locals alleged that criminals use the tin-shed house that was abandoned about two and a half years back.

Rajib secures

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a meeting later this year, Rajib will join Niaz Murshed, Ziaur Rahman, Reefat and Abdullah Al Rakib in the local elite club.

Rajib won his first norm during the 2002 Chess Olympiad in Slovenia and secured the second norm in Abu Dhabi last year during a GM tournament.

Rajib's highlight of a long career was reaching the second round of the World Chess Cup in Russia in November 2007 when he upset world No 19 Pavel Eljanov of Ukraine in the first round.

UN members

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counsellor of Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN, said, "In Bangladesh, we have some tribal peoples. The tribal communities are accorded various special privileges in order to enable themselves to attain sustainable development.

These include fiscal, educational and social privileges and benefits. The CHT Peace Accord was signed to continue government's efforts to ensure their political, social, educational and economic rights. Various agencies including the UNDP, Unicef and ADB are implementing development projects in the region."

In the evening, the indigenous delegates from Bangladesh met Rev Seamus P Finn, OMI, director of Creation Office based in Washington DC, and discussed human rights situation in Bangladesh.

UN General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim said, "Indigenous peoples are affected in a disproportionate manner by high level of poverty and extreme poverty as well as the lack of access to health services."

At the closing session, it was decided that economic and social development, indigenous women and second international decade of the world's indigenous peoples, and Arctic region be the focus of next year's session while implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples become a permanent item on the forum's agenda.

Secretary to the CA's office Kazi Aminul Islam and CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim were also present.

Big budget planned

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after the adjustment the petroleum products need subsidy due to price increase in the international market," says a BPC official.

The government also plans to raise the funds for the safety net programmes for the poor to Tk 9,000 crore. The revised budget of the current fiscal year allocated around Tk 3,700 crore for this purpose.

The expansion of the safety net programme funds will be to the tune of around 1 percent of the GDP (gross domestic product) compared to the last budget, sources say.

The government hopes the expansion will secure new employment to 20 lakh poor people, who will receive cash payments for undertaking local public work projects.

Besides, the government is working towards creating work opportunities for the poor for at least nine months in a year. The next budget may allocate Tk 2,000 crore for this purpose, the sources add.

Turning to the safety net programmes, the finance ministry sources say the size of existing programmes like Food For Work (FFW), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Test Relief (TR) and Open Market Sales (OMS) will be expanded so that more people can be benefited.

The government will allocate around 24 lakh tonnes of rice against the safety net programmes, which is 16 lakh tonnes in the current fiscal year, they say.

The government is going to increase the salaries of its employees by around 20 percent in the next fiscal year considering the price hike essentials.

"Preliminary estimation shows the government will have to spend Tk 3,210 crore in addition to its current

spending in the next budget to increase salaries of public sector employees," a finance ministry official told The Daily Star.

The current budget has allocated Tk 13,510 crore for the pay and allowances of government employees and it would be increased to Tk 16,720 crore in next budget.

The plan to increase the salaries can be seen as a result of the recent price hike of food and other commodities, which has subsequently raised the overall living expenses.

On increased payment of interest, sources say the government expenditure for payment against loans is going to reach Tk 12,910 crore in the next fiscal from the current spending of Tk 10,790 crore.

Eighty-seven percent of the spending against payment interest would be for domestic loans.

As of June 2007, total outstanding loan of Bangladesh stands at Tk 230,800 crore. Of the amount, domestic debts Tk 88,000 crore and foreign debts Tk 142,800 crore.

Interest rate of domestic loans is higher than the foreign loans. That's why we will have to spend a huge money though amount of domestic debt is small in comparison to the foreign loans," said a finance ministry official.

About the Annual Development Programme (ADP) spending in the next fiscal, sources say shifting from the usual trend of increasing the ADP allocation, the plan is to lower the budget and keep it in a realistic figure.

The next fiscal may allocate Tk 25,000 crore for the ADP, which is Tk 1,500 crore less than the original allocation of the current budget.

The planning ministry officials say in the first nine months of the current fiscal only 36 percent of the original ADP has been implemented.

351 killed as Nargis

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before a crucial referendum on its new constitution -- the first polling in Myanmar since general elections in 1990.

The coastal area of Ayeeyawady appears worst hit by the natural disaster, but Yangon was also battered.

Traffic lights, billboards and street lamps littered the roads after being knocked over by strong winds.

Trees in the leafy city were uprooted, crushing buildings and cars, while water pipes were also cut, forcing people out onto the streets with buckets to try and buy water from the few shops that remained open.

Roofs of houses have been torn away, while only a few taxis and buses -- which tripled their fares -- braved the debris-clogged streets on Sunday.

The information ministry official said seven empty boats had sunk in the country's main port, while Yangon's international airport was closed.

State media said the airport was due to reopen on Monday.

"Now the military and police have started to clean the city," the official said. "We are trying to get back to the normal situation as soon as possible."

Electricity supplies and telecommunications in Yangon have been cut since late Friday night as the storm bore down from the Bay of Bengal, packing winds of 190-240 kilometres (120-150 miles) per hour.

There are also fears that the

poorer outlying areas of Yangon, where their flimsy houses, might have been hard hit.

"A tea shop owner told me that many people in a Yangon suburb need urgent help for food and accommodation," one food vendor said. "Some children are not even wearing clothes."

Myanmar's infrastructure has been run into the ground by decades of mismanagement by the military, which has ruled since 1962.

It was not immediately known whether damage from the storm would affect next Saturday's referendum on a new constitution, which the ruling junta says will pave the way for democratic elections in 2010.

Critics, however, say the charter will simply enshrine the military's power.

Residents in Yangon said they had heard speculation that the referendum might be postponed, but the information ministry official refused to comment.

"We cannot say anything, it is up to the senior authorities," he said.

Thailand's meteorological department downgraded Nargis to a depression on Sunday, but warned of flash floods and heavy rains in northern, central and eastern Thai provinces as the storm crept over the border from Myanmar.

An official at Thailand's disaster prevention department told AFP that as of Sunday evening, there were no reports of severe flooding in the kingdom.

4 US marines killed

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military said in a statement, without specifying the exact location of the attack.

The attack came 10 days after a similar ambush in the province in which two US marines were killed and three wounded.

Friday's attack brought to 1,290 the US military's losses in Anbar since the March 2003 invasion, according to independent website www.casualties.org, closely trailing the 1,298 killed in the capital Baghdad.

Most of the US dead in Anbar, the biggest province in Iraq, have been due to roadside bombs.

The losses in Anbar make up nearly a third of the 4,071 US troops killed in the conflict so far.

The vast desert province that borders Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan was a key stronghold of the anti-US insurgency in the first years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Its provincial capital of Ramadi and the nearby city of Fallujah became symbols of Sunni Arab resistance to US forces in Iraq.

In one of the fiercest battles of the war so far, US forces virtually razed Fallujah to the ground in November 2004 in a devastating offensive to recapture the city from insurgents.

That month saw 137 US troops killed across Iraq -- the highest monthly figure till now -- most of them in the Fallujah battle.

According to US losses in Anbar peaked in 2006 with 356 service personnel killed.

But violence in the province fell dramatically last year as Sunni Arab tribes fell out with al-Qaida and joined the US-led war against the jihadist network which had made Anbar one of its bastions.

The policy of recruiting former insurgents to the battle against al-Qaida saw US losses in Anbar fall to 161 last year, prompting its extension to other restive provinces

BCL leader Roton

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Health Economics at Dhaka University (DU), and five other BCL leaders on January 16 last year from the central playground area on the DU campus. Roton had been detained in Dhaka Central Jail until being transferred to Myemensingh Jail on April 29 this year.

Rafiqul Islam, superintendent of police in Myemensingh, said Roton was arrested again under the Emergency Power Rules 2007.

Roton's family members alleged that due to Roton's involvement with BCL, the student wing of Awami League, the authorities have been holding him in detention for over 15 months under the EPR without any proven allegation.

On January 17, 2007, he was shown arrested by Shahbagh police under the EPR. He was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail the same day.

On April 2 the same year, the High Court (HC) declared his detention illegal, but later the Appellate Division stayed the judgment. On November 7, the Advisory Board of the HC released the five other leaders who were arrested with Roton. However, the board gave another three months' detention to him. The same board on January 24 extended the BCL leader's detention for an additional three months.

Roton's father Absar Uddin Haider Chowdhury, assistant controller of examinations at DU, demanded unconditional release of his son on humanitarian grounds as Roton's health condition seriously deteriorated in detention.

His father also raised the question how Roton could violate the

EPR when he was arrested only five days into the promulgation of State of Emergency on January 11, 2007.

In a joint statement, BCL central President Mahmud Hasan Ripon and its Acting General Secretary Syed Abul Kalam Azad, Dhaka metropolitan (south) BCL President Mamunur Rashid Shuvo and General Secretary Golam Sarwar Kabir, and DU unit President Sohel Rana Tipu and General Secretary Sazzad Sakib Badsha protested the fresh arrest of Roton and demanded his immediate release.

Threatening to announce tougher programmes for the release of its general secretary, the BCL statement, issued by Office Secretary Nasim AL Momin Rupok, said the government arrested Roton on political grounds only and violated his human rights.

Capsules seized

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NGOs have been trying to import it to help heroin addicts recover."

"As a drug, it is far more powerful than heroin," he said adding, "Methamphetamine is an ingredient of Yaba."

The narcotic substances were brought in by US citizen Zebunnessa, 65, in five luggage. Zebunnessa, who is of Bangladesh origin, managed to escape arrest after arriving from Kuwait on a Kuwait Airways flight.

Neyamul Islam said, "All the capsules were without labels and each contained 1.12 grams to 1.28 grams of narcotic substances."

Police and intelligence agencies are now trying to hunt down Zebunnessa, sources said.

Hasina firm to run

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"No one except Allah and the people of Bangladesh has the authority to decide whether I will participate in the election or not. The people will decide whether I am a corrupt or not," Hasina said.

"A non-elected government's holding power for a long time cannot yield any good result for a country. Only an elected and democratic government can deal with the problems the country is facing now," she said.

"When votes had to be recounted in the SCBA election on allegations of rigging, how can we expect that the parliamentary election would be transparent and neutral? The people must be careful to ensure a transparent and neutral election," Hasina told her lawyers.

She said setting up of courts one after another on the Jatya Sangsad Bhaban premises is an ominous sign.