



This old man has lost almost everything in erosion. His house has been devoured by the Padma in Ranipur village in Dohar, Dhaka. A young jackfruit tree has somehow survived. He uprooted the tree to take it with him while moving to the next village. **Bottom right**, a rescue ship salvages the ramp, which along with Mawa No 3 terminal's pontoon, drowned in the Padma. **Top right**, trucks in a long queue wait to cross the Padma as riverbank erosion and strong currents continue to disrupt ferry services on Mawa-Kawrakandi route.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Alive or dead

FROM PAGE 1

grieving father.

Shamsuddin said his family went to the police to file a general diary after his son went missing on December 6, but the police did not accept any GD for three days.

Like Shamsuddin, several family members of BNP leaders and activists, who were allegedly abducted by law enforcers, took part in an hour-long human chain marking 'International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances'.

The BNP-led-20 party-alliance organised the programme and formed the human chain stretching from Fakirapul to Bijoynagar via Nayapaltan beginning from 11:00am yesterday.

Earlier, the alliance postponed the human chain, scheduled to be held on August 30, as police denied permission for the programme. It, however, held the programme across the country on Saturday.

Sharing their pains and agonies amidst a heart-rending atmosphere, the family members of the victims demanded that the government bring back their loved ones immediately.

In the human chain, Sharmin Sultana, wife of Khalid Hasan Sohel, 79 Ward President of JCD, said, "My husband was involved in politics only. He was not a terrorist. It is regrettable that many top terrorists are moving about freely in society, but a politician like him is now nowhere."

## Govt to change rule

FROM PAGE 1

write something in place of Bangladesh Bank in the rules."

The rules were introduced in April to transfer the power of appointing members of Grameen Bank board from the microcredit organisation itself to the BB, a move that brought the lender in the grip of the government.

The new rules gave six months to the central bank to form a commission to elect the nine directors of the 12-member board.

The BB has verbally informed the finance ministry that it would not be able to hold the elections, as it is not involved in any election either for private or public banks.

The BB and the government were in talks in July and August to know whether the central bank can hold the

Kaniz Fatema, sister of JCD leader Samrat, said her brother was the sole breadwinner of the family as their father was sick.

"If anyone commits a crime, he has to face trial. But one cannot be abducted for any reason," she said.

BNP leader Illias Ali's son Arnob alleged that 28 months had already passed since his father went missing. "We got assurances everyday from the government but we haven't got back him yet," said Arnob.

Hosne Ara, mother of Bangshal JCD leader Jahirul Islam, said her son had been missing for months. She pleaded with the authorities to get him back.

Marufa Islam, sister of Sajedul Islam Suman, general secretary of BNP Ward 38, urged the government to return her brother or take the initiative to rescue him.

While addressing the human chain, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhruul Islam Alamgir claimed that 24 of his party men had fallen victim to forced disappearances during the anti-government movement last year in Dhaka city.

The BNP spokesman alleged that the government was using the security forces to repress the opposition.

Speaking on the occasion, BNP Dhaka city unit convener Mirza Abbas claimed that the party had come to know that the government was making a fresh list to have more people disappear.

elections. The BB board also discussed the issue as the banking and financial institutions division of the finance ministry put pressure on it to hold the elections.

The central bank has also informed the law ministry of its position and discussed the issue with senior lawyers.

However, Muhiith yesterday admitted that "maybe opinions from the central bank were not sought before the responsibility of holding the elections was handed to it".

Sources said a retired judge may be appointed to conduct the elections with the help of state-run banks and Grameen Bank.

The recent development may make it difficult for the government to hold the elections within the six-month deadline, which ends on October 5.

## Amnesty perturbed

FROM PAGE 1

It is, however, heartening that eight Rab officials have so far been arrested in connection with the grisly seven murders in Narayanganj in April, said Amnesty International, but they were yet to be charged.

"The Narayanganj case is a litmus test for Bangladesh's legal system," said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's Bangladesh Researcher.

"Police must now follow through with a thorough investigation and bring those responsible to justice.

"The government of Bangladesh must respond to long standing calls by both national and international human rights organisations and stop torture," Abbas Faiz said.

"Bangladesh has made progress on reducing poverty and other development indicators, but this has not been matched when it comes to respecting human rights...or removing restrictions on freedom of expression," he added.

Amnesty International has documented torture that is still rife in the places of detention across Bangladesh.

All of more than 100 former detainees it has spoken to in recent years have reported being subject to some form of torture or ill-treatment, as per the press release.

Torture methods include beatings, suspension from the ceiling or electric shocks to the genitals. In at least two cases documented, the detainees also claimed to have been shot in the legs by police, leading to amputation in one case, it says.

It indicates that the government has failed to take decisive actions against human rights violations, said Amnesty.

"We have documented a disturbing trend that suggests the security forces are responsible for a continuing pattern of disappearances, even though they deny it," Abbas said.

"The government has to take a long, hard look at the conduct of its own security forces, and end the almost complete lack of accountability around these cases."

Regarding press freedom, Amnesty said the authorities in Bangladesh over the last two years had stepped up a crackdown on freedom of expression, in par-

ticular through draconian laws governing internet usage.

At least four bloggers and two human rights defenders have been charged under the Information and Communications Technology Act, a vaguely formulated law that gives the authorities broad scope to charge those spreading "defaming information".

Editors and journalists Amnesty International spoke to stated that more subtle forms of repression had increased, ranging from threatening phone calls to pressure from security forces on editors to deny media space to government critics.

In response to Amnesty's queries on the above issues, the government authorities without providing any detail said cases of enforced disappearances had been investigated, and charges of torture had been framed "against some law enforcers, according to the press release.

They also said, "any law would be formulated in consultation with all concerned". However, no details were given about the format of such consultation, Amnesty said.

## Farmers brace for huge crop loss

FROM PAGE 16

The DAE is going to start its field survey today to get the "actual picture" of the damaged crops in the ongoing floods, the DG told The Daily Star yesterday.

It is possible to plant Aman saplings till the end of September and the affected farmers would have time for re-cultivation.

For this season, the DAE had set a target of cultivating T-Aman in a total 52.5 lakh hectares of land in the country.

"But so far, we have brought 47 lakh hectares of land under cultivation," Abbas said.

A significant portion of the croplands have been washed away by the Jamuna, Teesta, Ghagot, Padma, Meghna, Arial Khan, Old Brahmaputra and Feni rivers while another large portion of the croplands is still reeling under the floodwaters.

Most of these crop fields are in Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Jamalpur, Bogra, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Munshiganj, Feni, Noakhali, Shariatpur, Madaripur,

Sirajganj, Sylhet and Sunamganj districts, report our correspondents, quoting local agricultural officials.

If the huge amount of T-Aman in the vast lands of northern districts is damaged, it would be an "extra burden" on the farmers, fighting against the natural calamity for over last two weeks.

In last few months, the farmers had to spend extra money for irrigation as there had been a drought like situation, reports our Rangpur correspondent.

A total of 45,772 hectares of croplands in five out of eight districts of the Rangpur Divisions have been damaged in the recent floods. Rangpur has been the worst affected region this year.

Agriculture experts said if the flood situation does not improve in a day or two, the production of T-Aman would be 10 percent below the target set for the current season, said Kamal Kumar Sarker, additional director of the DAE for Rangpur Region.

Many of the affected farmers said there would be a "negative" impact

on the Aman production if they are not provided with the necessary assistance by the government.

Asked whether the government would take any measure to compensate the affected farmers, the DAE director general said the government would help by providing them with seeds and saplings of various crops, if needed.

"The DAE and other government agencies are preparing seed beds. But we would take the final decision after determining the total damages," said the DAE DG.

Apart from Aman cultivation, fish farming in flood-hit 19 districts have also been severely affected.

Only in Jamalpur, 2215 ponds out of total 22095 have been washed away by floodwaters, incurring an estimated loss of Tk 4.76 crore, said the district fisheries department.

"Hundreds of farmers engaged in fish farming are facing a great economic loss due to this flood as fishes and fries float away," said Md. Abu Hanifa, assistant director, fisheries department of Jamalpur.

## Mawa

FROM PAGE 1

70-year-old man was picking up a young jackfruit tree that he planted at a corner of the yard of his house last year.

Everything was going well for him and his family members until the swelling Padma started eating into his house. The river eventually devoured the house and all their belongings, forcing his family to move to the next village.

But the old man waited till the river eroded the yard yesterday. He then moved to the next village to join his family members.

When this correspondent tried to strike up a conversation with the ill-fated man, he said, "I have lost everything ... What use will it be if I talk to you?"

Like him, hundreds of people are becoming homeless due to massive erosion by the mighty Padma.

## Mud, potholes

FROM PAGE 16

Thanks to the poor drainage system, the dilapidated road sometimes goes under knee-deep water in many places even after slight rains, causing untold sufferings to the travelers.

Anika Tasnim, who uses the road every day to go to her school on vans, said she often feels unwell because of bumpy rides.

"I get scared when I see my school-van narrowly passing through large potholes," said the Class-X student of Monipur High School.

Mohammad Russell, driver of a Bihanga Pariban bus operating on the Duairpara-Sadarghat route, said "unusually long" traffic gridlock were wasting people's time and money in the area.

Setting up water pipelines along the Duairpara-Shialbari road has eventually narrowed the space for vehicular movement, ultimately leaving people to be caught up in the traffic tangles for hours.

The bus driver said it took one and a half hours to reach Duairpara from Mirpur-1 on Saturday. Usually, it is only a 20-minute distance, he added.

"Now, we cannot run our bus as we did before because of the time being wasted on the road," Russell said, adding that the owner of the bus was having an estimated loss of Tk 1,200 every day.

Rafi Karim, a first-year student of Dhaka Residential Model College, comes early to the bus stop in Rupnagar Abasik area to go to his college in Mohammadpur.

The bus stop is in the middle of the Duairpara-Shialbari road.

"I come to the bus stop early because the buses are not available due to the traffic congestion in the area," he said, adding that the situation was "killing his study time".

Mohammad Palash, a driver of Ashirbad Paribahan operating on the Duairpara-Azimpur route, said the condition of the 2-km road started deteriorating since the installation of the pipelines began.

Wasa gave the job to set up the pipelines to Navana Construction Ltd. Engineer Abir, who works for the company, said all the water pipelines would be installed in seven days.

Contacted, Syed Qudrat Ullah, additional chief engineer of Dhaka South City Corporation, said that they were unable to repair the road as Wasa was still working on it.

"We will start mending the road as soon as Wasa finishes its job," he added.

## Parliament backs PM

FROM PAGE 1

"This is not a protest, a sit-in or a political gathering. This is a rebellion. It is a rebellion against state institutions. It is a rebellion against the state of Pakistan," Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar told parliament.

"Clear guidance from this parliament would give strength to the police.... They are not revolutionaries, they are intruders and terrorists," he said of the protesters.

Aitzaz Ahsan from the opposition Pakistan People's Party said: "As you have said, you will not resign, no one can force you to resign. The entire parliament is with you."

Sharif, wearing traditional Pakistani clothes, made no remarks, taking notes and listening to the speeches. A spokesman said he might speak later in the week after all the lawmakers made their speeches in alphabetical order.

During the day's developments the

Supreme Court issued notices to all parliamentary parties along with the PAT, and more importantly a Joint session of Parliament opened in which all the parties put aside their differences and stood firmly against what they termed were attempts to derail the democratic process in Pakistan.

MNA's from various political parties gave their support to the prime minister and criticised the PTI chief Imran Khan and PAT leader Tahirul Qadri, Dawn reported early today.

From Aitzaz Ahsan to Mahmood Achakzai and from Chaudhry Nisar to Maulana Fazlur Rehman, MNA's took shots at Imran Khan and said the protest movement was jeopardising the democratic set-up.

Estranged PTI MNA Javed Hashmi announced his resignation from the National Assembly and embraced briefly his former party leader and now PM Nawaz Sharif, who listened to speech after speech denouncing the

marchers and voices of support for him that crossed party lines.

Meanwhile, Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri continued their protests and criticized political figures as well and reiterated their demand that both Nawaz Sharif and Punjab CM Shahbaz Sharif had to go.

Pakistan has been in turmoil since mid-August when tens of thousands of protesters led by Khan, a former hero cricket player, and outspoken cleric Tahir ul-Qadri flooded into the capital Islamabad, refusing to leave unless Sharif resigns.

Convening the week-long parliamentary session appears to be part of Sharif's attempts to divert attention from the streets and shift the conflict into the political arena.

The protesters accuse the government of corruption and Sharif of rigging last year's election. They have categorically refused any talks. Sharif denies their accusations and has urged

them to come to the negotiating table.

Speaking outside parliament, Khan told supporters he would meet Siraj-ul-Haq, head of the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami party, later in the day to discuss the situation. But he stopped short of saying he was ready for talks with the government.

"Siraj-ul-Haq is coming with (opposition figures) for talks, we have invited them to come. We will hold talks with them," Khan said. "The door for talks should always remain open."

He added that lawmakers from his party, who had earlier quit their seats in parliament, would attend Wednesday's session in the legislature to present their views - another move possibly taking the violent confrontation a step closer to the field of political dialogue.

The demonstrations turned deadly over the weekend as protesters armed with clubs and wearing gas masks to protect themselves against teargas tried

to storm Sharif's residence. At least three people were killed and hundreds wounded.

But the capital was quiet on Tuesday, with no reports of violence. As deputies made their impassioned speeches, a crowd of a few thousand protesters massed peacefully just outside in the so-called Red Zone - a central area where Sharif's office, ministries and many embassies are located.

The chaotic scenes in the usually orderly capital have unnerved a nation where power has often changed hands through military coups rather than elections, prompting speculation that the military was prepared to intervene again.

Few expect the army to actually seize power this time but many believe it is using the protracted crisis to weaken Sharif and consolidate exclusive control of key security and foreign policy issues such as relations with India and Afghanistan.