

THREE FLOODS IN TWO MONTHS

Sunamganj sees 930km of its roads devastated

MINTU DESHWARA, back from Sunamganj

Communications on roads in Sunamganj have become extremely difficult after three back-to-back floods destroyed about 930 kilometres of roads in the district.

With many parts of a same road washed away, commuting as well as transporting of all sorts of goods and essentials are increasingly getting hazardous and costly, said Jamilur Rahman, a trader from Sunamganj town.

Oftentimes, people have to disembark and unload goods from a vehicle to cross the damaged portion of a road and find a new transport on the other side.

This situation is putting lives of critically ill patients in danger, he also said.

In Tahirpur upazila, Shaktiarkhal Bazar resident Islam Uddin said boats have replaced motorised vehicles on a 200-meter-long section of Sunamganj-Tahirpur road near Shaktiarkhal Bazar.

While the damaged network of roads left people in a number of upazilas cut off from the district headquarters, it rendered many vehicle drivers in the area jobless, said Mousabbir Mia, a car driver by profession.

Contacted, Mahbub Alam, executive engineer of Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Sunamganj, said the first wave of the floods hit Sunamganj between June 25 and June 29. The second wave struck on July 9 and the third one on July 20.

The three floods in two months' time have caused extensive damage to the communications network in all upazilas of Sunamganj, by completely destroying 22 vital roads and severely damaging 24 different bridges and culverts.

The estimation of damage on the 900 kilometres, out of total 4,795 kilometres, of road in the district stands at Tk 450 crore.

As many as four upazilas -- Tahirpur, Bishwambarpur, Jamalganj and Chhatak -- are now detached from Sunamganj district town due to breaches at various points of road network in the district.

The LGED was working relentlessly to temporarily restore the roads and he hoped to open the roads to public within a few days.

They would send a permanent repair proposal to the ministry once the complete account of the damage is available and they would start the permanent repair work soon after necessary budget allocation is approved by the ministry, the executive engineer added.

Zahirul Islam, executive engineer of Roads and Highways Department (RHD), said out of 228 km of roads maintained by the RHD in the district, 30 km of it has sustained Tk 30 crore worth of damage due to the floods.

RHD was also working on to maintain communications by doing temporary repair work before an approval for permanent restoration work is received from the ministry, he also said.



Thanks to three waves of floods in two months, this is what many parts of Sunamganj-Chhatak road now look like.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA



A farmer along with cows swims in the Brahmaputra river for grazing the cattle at Astamir char in Kurigram's Chilmari upazila.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Tale of river island cowboys

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Bangladesh is home to various cattle breeds but the tale of the struggles of cowboys, especially those hailing from the riverine chars, often goes unheard.

Since his childhood, 35-year-old Afzal Hossain has been swimming across the mighty Brahmaputra river amid risk of life to reach char for rearing cattle of other people. He hails from Chilmari upazila in Kurigram.

Like Afzal, a number of cowboys have been trying to change their lot by rearing cattle of owner of domestic animals in the riverine chars of Brahmaputra under Kurigram Sadar, Ulipur, Rowmari, Rajibpur and Chilmari upazilas for years.

Every day they swim in the river along with the cows to reach the char where the cattle get sufficient grass to eat and water to drink. They leave home for grazing the cows at dawn and return before the sunset. When the cattle get busy eating grass, all cowboys hangout in the char. They sing bhawaiya and bhatiali songs. Some of them are also skilled in playing the bamboo made flute.

Each cowboy gets Tk 8,000 to Tk 10,000 per month from the cattle owner for rearing 10 to 15 cows in the river char. Apart from this, they get meals from the owner daily.

Sharing a snippet from his life, Afzal Hossain from Astamir char in Chilmari upazila of the district said he has been working as a cowboy since his childhood.

Every day he along with 15 cows swims in the river to feed the cattle in the char. He gets Tk 10,000 from the owner per month for rearing the cattle. Alongside, the cattle owner gives him meal for two times a day. Afzal further said every day he has to cross the river for at least four times a day to go to one char from another char with the cattle. He has been swimming across

their cows into the herd. Apart from this, most people of their community do not have ability to buy cattle.

His family lives on what he gets by rearing cattle of other people in the river char as a cowboy, said Khaleq.

Khaleq added that the story does not end here. They even cannot take meal at noon while rearing cows in the river char. They only eat food, provided by the cattle owner, at dawn and night. After all this, they have to depend on the chars of Brahmaputra for their livelihood at the end of day.

Solaiman Ali, a cattle owner of Char Jadurchar of Brahmaputra in Rowmari upazila, said he has a herd of 15 cows and a cowboy, who is paid Tk 9,000 monthly. Besides, the cowboy gets meals for two times daily.

Solaiman also added he earns Tk 3.50 lakh every year by selling cows. They are really blessed with the river char where the cattle get sufficient green grass to eat and water to drink free of cost.

Golam Farooq, a veterinary surgeon of Livestock Department in Kurigram, said it is seen that there is strong immunity system, developed in the people of char area and their domestic animals due to nature's blessings. Due to this, the cattle in the river char area rarely get sick.

However, livestock department officials often visit the char areas and give advice to the farmers on how to rear their cattle, he said.

Each cowboy gets Tk 8,000 to Tk 10,000 per month from the cattle owner for rearing 10 to 15 cows in the river char. Apart from this, they get meals from the owner

the mighty river amid risk of life for years to run his family. However, the cows are very skilled in swimming.

Another cowboy Khaleq Islam from char Kodalkati said solvent people in char areas have the ability to buy cattle but cannot rear them as they do other jobs.

He further said they make a lot of money for cattle owners by rearing cows on the char, but none of them can own cattle as the owners forbade them to bring

Villagers fear fresh attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

People of bordering Tetra village in Bochaganj upazila fear that there may be a fresh attack on them by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) after they protested the Indian troops' illegal intrusion into Bangladesh territory and beating a farmer on Friday.

Meanwhile, nearly 24 hours of the incident, a flag meeting between the high officials of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and BSF was held at the village around 11:00am and continued till 12:30pm yesterday.

But surprisingly, the BGB high officials left the village without giving any directives to the villagers, villagers alleged.

Villagers said a BSF member entered the village, around 100 metres near the border on Friday morning and suddenly attacked one Hamed Ali, 30, son of late Akbar Ali of Dakkhin Tetra village, while he was spreading fertilizer on his paddy field.

When local people protested the incident, a group of 20 to 25 BSF men, equipped with arms, entered the village again and charged batons on the innocent villagers.

Later, several chase and counter chase incidents took place between the villagers and BSF troops for nearly half an hour, one of the villagers Ashrafur Islam said.

The BSF troops went back to their territory after a team of BGB arrived there.

Saiful Islam of the village alleged that BSF men beat up his family members in the same fashion about three months ago.

AL leader killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Criminals hacked a local leader of ruling Awami League (AL) to death in Daulatpur upazila of the district yesterday morning.

The deceased, Hasinur Rahman, 56, son of Jamir Uddin, was a cousin of Kushtia-1 lawmaker AKM Sarwar Jahan, police said.

Officer in Charge (OC) of Daulatpur Police Station Nishikanto Roy said criminals attacked Hasinur near a mosque in Filip Nagar area around 8:00am when he was out for a morning walk.

Locals took injured Hasinur to Daulatpur Upazila Health Complex where the doctors declared him dead.

Firearms seized, 1 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Detective Branch (DB) of Police arrested an alleged arms trader from Char-Bhabanipur Kandapara area in Sirajganj's Belkuchi upazila on Friday and seized eight pipe guns from his possession.

The arrestee is Gopal Chandra Sutrodhar, 34.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Sirajganj DB police raided the area around 6:30am when Gopal was waiting for a buyer and arrested him, Officer in Charge (OC) of Sirajganj DB Police Mizanur Rahman said.

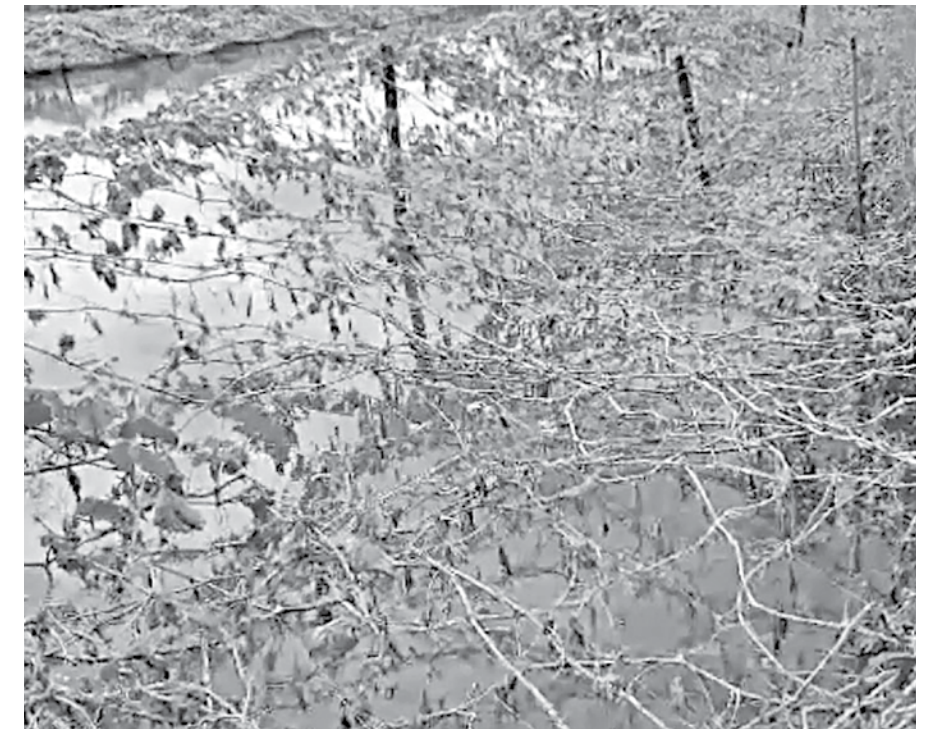
OC Mizanur said, Gopal, a listed arms peddler, was arrested in October last year, but he recently came out of jail after securing bail from the court.

7 'robbers' held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested seven members of a suspected robbers' gang from Library Bazar area of Pabna town on Wednesday night.

The arrestees, Abdul Jabbar, 30, Akash Sheikh, 30, Aslam Sheikh, 30, Sohan Islam, 31, Nur Ali, 30, Rejaul Karim, 35, and Doyel Sheikh, 30, hailing from different villages in Sadar upazila, were later handed over to Pabna Sadar Police Station.



Heavy rains and tidal waters in the last few days have damaged a crop field in Bagerhat's Chitalmari upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Rains cause loss of Tk 17cr for farmers

According to Bagerhat DAE about 9,500 hectares of croplands have been damaged due to heavy rainfall this year

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Farmers in the low lying areas of different upazilas in Bagerhat have incurred a loss of about Tk 17 crore due to heavy rains and tidal surge.

As soon as the water started receding in the areas, its dreadful impact became visible, said the growers.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Bagerhat, Aus and Aman paddy, betel leaf, sugarcane and various vegetables have been cultivated on 52,309 hectares of land in different upazilas of the district this season. Of them, 9,500 hectares of croplands have been damaged due to heavy rainfall, coupled with tidal flows.

Now the farmers in the areas fear it will affect their Aman production target this year.

More than 25 thousand and 36 farmers have incurred Tk 17.18 crore this year due to tidal surge, said a DAE official.

Earlier, the cyclone Amphan also caused extensive damage to crops in the low lying areas. This agricultural sector in the areas rather comes to the victims as double blow. So the farmers have urged the government to extend help for them in this crisis.

Ashim Mandol, a farmer of Narendrapur village in Kachua upazila, said after receding of waters, it was seen that his chilli and tomato fields got badly damaged. Now the land has to be prepared again for cultivation. He will have to spend extra money for this.

Another grower Nirmol of Kantipara village in Morelganj upazila said the vegetable plants on his field are now dying after the waters receded in the area.

"In this situation, I do not know how to start farming anew. However, I have heard that the government is giving incentives to the affected farmers. If we get government loans on easy terms, we will be able to start the farming once again," said Nirmol.

Raghunath Kar, deputy director (DD) of Bagerhat DAE, said in the last few days, incessant rains and tidal waters have damaged about 9,500 hectares of croplands in the low lying areas of the district.

It has caused a loss of 17 crore and 18 lakh taka, said the DD.

The DAE official further said that they are providing seeds and fertilisers to the affected farmers in the areas. They are also giving technical assistance to the growers.



Agitated workers and employees of Pabna Sugar Mill in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila staged demonstration in front of the mill gate on Thursday to press for payment of six months' arrears.

PHOTO: STAR