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Floods in relentless fury

Dhaka deluge to worsen; sewerage and water systems collapse; death toll now 285



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

So much to care about... A girl holds her baby brother in her lap and covers him against the elements with a bowl as she leads a long line of an expectant crowd queuing up in knee-deep water for food at the flood shelter at Ashrafabad High School in Kamrangirchar yesterday.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The worst monsoon deluge since 1988 is likely to pick up pace in the central districts, including Dhaka, swamping more areas in a major humanitarian crisis that has blighted the lives of more than 25 million people.

The Disaster Forum, a non-governmental organisation, in its latest report said the floods yesterday continued to worsen in 17 districts -- mostly central -- as rain-fed rivers raged in full spate.

About 40 percent of the capital went under water affecting 5 million people and wrecking water and sewerage systems, with the water level in the Buriganga river continu-

ing to swell.

The collapse of the water and sewerage systems disrupted water supply to most families in the city of over 13 million and smelling floodwater leaked into water pipes.

Nayapaltn was the latest addition to the list of areas such as Motijheel, Fakirerpool and Gulshan that were reeling under water.

"The flood situation in Dhaka is likely to deteriorate," the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre said in its bulletin yesterday.

Dhaka Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka called on people irrespective of political hues to help flood victims, an appeal that came from a

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When highway is home

MORSHED ALI KHAN, from Sirajgarj

Thousands of desperate people have moved on to Sirajgarj-Kalipur highway, as the water level of the river Jamuna has crossed the 1998-mark at 14.81 metres.

The 30-kilometre road itself is

under threat at more than 200 places where large cracks and cave-ins have developed. Desperate residents of all the villages under Kazipur Upazila are now living on the roads and rail tracks that are still above the surging waters.

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Govt rules out state of emergency

RAFIQ HASAN

The government yesterday ruled out the possibility of declaring a state of emergency or humanitarian crisis in the country because of the devastating floods which have submerged two-thirds of land and affected over 25 million people.

"The flood situation in the country is yet to deteriorate to such a level that would warrant the government to declare a state of emergency or raise the fear of a humanitarian crisis in the near future," said Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf.

Commenting on a newspaper report citing a forecast by UN body World Food Programme about a looming humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh, Yusuf asked, "Why should we fear for a humanitarian crisis when we do not have any food crisis in the country?"

The government has over nine lakh metric tonnes (MT) of food stock at its silos, which is in addition to huge stocks of relief materials. Besides, private importers would import food if needed, the minister pointed out.

According to the newspaper report, the UN agency expressed concern at the forthcoming high tide in the Bay of Bengal in early August after the flood, which could spell a serious humanitarian crisis in a matter of weeks.

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Deluge instils shortfall fear in exporters

BGMEA appeals to foreign buyers to accept delayed shipment

M ABDUR RAHIM and SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Export this year may suffer a major setback due to the progressively worsening flood, caused by heavy downpour in the upstream areas, that already has submerged 42 districts.

The government has a \$8.5-billion export target for the current fiscal, but exporters fear the target is unlikely to be achieved due to the prevailing flood situation.

All exporters, particularly those of garment, frozen foods, leather products, shrimp and poultry products, fear a major slide in production and delayed shipment.

With the post-multi-fibre arrangement regime set to stage in from January next, garment owners are the most fearful of losing market share due to the shipment delay.

An acute apprehension of heavy loss is dogging them as they find it real tough to meet buyer orders with workers' attendance dropping to as low as 40 percent. Most of the garment workers, who live in the flood-prone low-lying areas, are in difficulty to find

a way to reach their workplaces. The dread of stocklot caused by delayed shipment prompted the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) to appeal to the local agents of foreign buyers to take the flood situation into consideration and accept delayed shipments from the flood-affected RMG units.

With the Dhaka-Chittagong highway under threat of inundation, the apparel exporters fear the worst if the flooding deteriorates any more.

"If the Dhaka-Chittagong highway goes under water, we will be left with the only option to ship goods by cargo planes or chartered planes which will increase the production cost of every unit we export," said a leading garment exporter.

The BGMEA bosses met in an emergency meeting yesterday to devise their next course of action to tackle the natural calamity, one of the worst that Bangladesh suffered in recent times.

Knitwear exporters are also worried of a major slide in export

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Drowning hopes, shrinking options

Bashabo people stuck for days together

INAM AHMED and JULEFKAR ALI MANIK

Every night Lucy goes to sleep with a false hope that the water will go down the next morning. Morning comes with more cruelty -- she finds water sloshing even higher. Her hope dies. Another day she cannot go to work. Another day she misses her food. She has to do with only one meal with her husband and a 3-year-old child.

Lucy's story is repeated for many in Bashabo. Bashabo today is reeling. It has become a huge pocket submerged in knee- to waist-deep floodwater. Full of filth and excreta. It stinks.

"For the last seven days I could not go to my work," said Lucy, who works as a home help. "My rickshaw-puller husband could not go to work. And my child was down with diarrhea. I spent Tk 500 on her treatment. Now I am left with nothing."

The relief is hard to come. At

Bashabo Community Centre where Lucy has camped with her family, 'the relief people' came twice. Once with some rice and she got 1 kg of it two days ago, lucky to be about 15 who got a share of it. She showed her empty pot yesterday.

"We have already been skipping two meals a day. Now we have to go without any."

"They enlisted us twice," said Halima, another refugee at the camp. "The people came yesterday with a promise to serve us Khichuri. We waited till midnight. It did not come."

Masuda, another refugee, said she is living on puffed rice for the last four days.

In waist-deep water, Hazera walks slowly, with a tired movement. A 4-year-old girl in her lap.

"My school is closed because of the flood and I did not get my salary," said Hazera who works as a school assistant. "I have nothing to eat today. When I asked for money,

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Septuagenarian Taturunnisa slashes her way through stinky floodwaters in north Bashabo in Dhaka yesterday to buy essentials at a nearby market that now seems light years away.

Human wastes make it messy

2.5m cubic metres of sewage mingle with floodwaters as outlets blocked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Flood-hit Dhaka reeks of human waste with 2.5 million cubic metres of sewage spilling onto floodwater in five days, as the authorities have blocked all outlets to prevent the backflow of water from rivers.

With every passing day, more than half a million waste will add to the filth.

Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) can dispose of only .12 million cubic

metres of waste of 1.3 million cubic metres through its 778 kilometres of sewers a day.

Wasa officials say that 84 pumps at drain exits clear another .6 million cubic metres of waste through storm sewers, but the remaining .58 million cubic metres of waste pass through open and covered drains.

Wasa Managing Director ANH Akhter Hossain told The Daily Star that human waste could get stuck in the drains as residents connect

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DHAKA-10 BY-POLL HC asks returning officer to file report of rest 33 centres

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday asked the returning officer (RO) of the July 1 Dhaka-10 parliamentary by-polls to submit a report on army deployment in the rest 33 centres in two weeks.

On Saturday, the RO submitted to the court a report of 70 centres.

The High Court Division Bench of Justice MA Wahhab Miah and Justice Zinat Ara on Saturday asked the RO to submit a complete report of all 103 centres in Ramna-Tejgaon constituency on army deployment in two weeks.

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Tk 1,400cr crop loss assessed JS body not happy over rehabilitation plan

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A parliamentary standing committee yesterday termed the allocation for rehabilitation of the flood-hit farm sector highly inadequate, prompting Agriculture Minister MK Anwar to assure it of increased funding over and above the Tk 48 crore sum.

Though the agriculture ministry assessed a staggering crop loss of Tk 1,400 crore in 36 districts due to the flood so far, it proposed a meagre funding for the rehabilitation programme.

Endorsing the view, MK Anwar told the meeting of the committee on agriculture ministry the flood situation might turn even worse than those in 1988 and 1998, sources said.

Based on last week's reports, the ministry also forecast more crop damage as the floodwaters continue to submerge farmlands, affecting three million farming families already.

Small farmers will spend the rehabilitation fund on fertiliser, seed and other agri-inputs in the

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Dhaka summit will speed up Saarc activity, Khaleda says

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed the hope that the 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka will further strengthen the South Asian body to play a far-reaching role in establishing peace, carrying out development and alleviating poverty.

"We want the next summit to be a millennium model in both organisational and substantial aspects," Khaleda said while presiding over a preparatory meeting on the summit of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) to be held on January 9-11 next year.

The seven-nation regional

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Malik mauls India

CRININFO, Colombo

Shoaib Malik kept Pakistan alive in the Asia Cup with a dashing 143 that propelled them to a 59-run win at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo.

There were some climactic moments at the end, with India just managing to avoid conceding a bonus point -- a factor that could have a huge bearing on deciding the

finalists.

Halfway through the game, with the top order nearly all gone, India were out of it, and they targeted 241 instead -- the score they needed to avoid conceding a bonus point. But with six runs needed in the last over, the tallenders pressed the panic button and India nearly made a meal of it. It all came down to running two byes and, thankfully for

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