



Down and out in flood shelters

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Janu Begum could not sleep for the last two days, as she was hungry. "I do not worry much about me but my children," she said.

Janu who lived in a slum in Mugda took shelter in a government school in Motijheel with 500 others after floodwaters submerged her shanty. She tried to stay the last minute out in her shanty enduring all woes but left when one of her children drowned in floodwaters at the dead of night.

"When I heard some schools were opened as shelters for flood victims, I thought I can save my other children. But now I think they will starve to death," Janu sobbed.

Most flood victims have similar stories to tell. The number of flood victims is rising every day, crowding the flood shelters. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) opened 206 shelters where at least 1,50,724 people took refuge.

Also, some shelters have been set up with private initiative. But getting access to a flood centre does not ensure enough food, safe drinking water and hygiene.

"I need to earn some money to feed my family no matter how risky it is," said Tayeb Ali, a rickshawpuller from Meradia who took shelter in an under-construction building at Banashree.

Some people came and listed their names but no aid reached until now, he said. "They would die if I leave them unfed until relief comes," said Tayeb who pedals his rickshaw in the inundated areas.

"Saving own life is termed as faraj (a must)," said Hasna Begum of Kamalapur slum now living in Motijheel Government Boys' School. "But I doubt whether we can live now, as we don't have enough food," she said anxiously.

Hasna, a dayworker, is living in uncertainty with her family, as no aid has reached there and she is unable to earn because of floods.

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Rahela Begum, another flood-hit dayworker in a nearby centre, was luckier than Hasna to get some relief after five days in the centre. She said it was inadequate. "I prepared two meals yesterday and can make only one meal today with 2 kg rice, 1 kg potato and 250 grams lentils I got."

Things are no better for those with a little money either, as the prices of most essentials spiralled. Most shelters do not provide space for cooking.

"I bought some small fish from the nearby market but cannot cook as there is no water," said Sultana Khatun in a flood centre in Motijheel. "There is a water tap in the centre that supplies water twice a day." Most residents of the flood centres said they heard Dhaka Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority) supplying fresh water in mobile vans but never got it.

Lack of hygienic latrines added to the woes of flood victims in over-crowded flood shelters. "We have already around 2,000 people living in the school and more are turning up in search of shelter," said Begum Tanjila Ashraf, headmistress of Motijheel Government Girls' High School.

"The latrines are leaking filthy water," she said, adding the school staff is cleaning the toilets regularly and victims were supplied with bleaching powder and saline from school fund.

Asked if the school authorities gave any food to the flood victims, she said the school could not afford it, as it does not have fund.

Mohammed Mohsinuddin, executive officer of the DCC flood monitoring cell, told The Daily Star that the DCC gave Tk 25,000 to each ward commissioner to help the flood victims. The DCC would distribute 250 packets of food products in each flood-affected ward.

Asked what kind of food is there in the packet, he said he is unaware of it. He said the DCC would give another 50 food packets to each ward which has 5 kg rice, 1 kg lentil, 1 kg potato, 1 kg salt and a dozen of candles.

Hospitals fill with diarrhoea patients

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Diarrhoea outbreak has taken a serious turn in the city's flood-hit areas and experts fear the worst will come when the floodwaters recede.

Sources at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), popularly known as Mohakhali Cholera Hospital, said 475 patients, most of them children, were admitted to the centre yesterday. Only the previous day, the number was 441.

They said diarrhoea patients are increasing everyday.

"This is already serious, but diarrhoea outbreak will peak in the form of an epidemic as floodwaters recede," said Dr PK Bardhan, a scientist at the ICDDR,B.

He, however, said adequate

supply of pure drinking water to the affected areas is now urgently needed to arrest spread of the waterborne disease.

The ICDDR,B has taken all preparations to handle the expected increased inflow of patients in the coming days.

"We handled more than 900 patients a day during the 1998 flood. We are now capable of handling even more patients if need be" said Ramzan Ali, hospital manager of the ICDDR,B.

Most patients coming to the ICDDR,B for treatment are from Rayerbazar, Khilgaon, Bashabo, Badda Kuril, Demra, Beraid, Malibagh, Shantibagh, Mohammadpur and Keranigonj.

Shishu Hospital also reported a 15-20 percent increase in diarrhoea patients this week compared to last week.

The hospital authorities also

said they have every preparation to face the post-flood attack of diarrhoea and other related diseases.

The flood shelters are hit hard by the disease because of a dearth of drinking water. Hospitals and clinics are flooding with an increased number of diarrhoea patients everyday.

The situation has turned even worse as sewerage water has got stuck over almost one-third of the city, escaping into water pipelines and reservoirs.

Although Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has been supplying drinking water through its mobile teams at 14 points, the effort is inadequate to serve the large number of people affected in 56 wards.

As a result many flood-hit people are compelled to drink contaminated water.

Prices rising with rising water

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Soaring prices of most of the essential commodities over past two weeks has hit the consumers hard and has aggravated the sufferings of the flood-affected people.

While sellers are attributing the sudden hike to the floods, prices of many of the commodities like onion, red pepper, ginger, turmeric and lentils which have not been directly affected by the situation, have gone up by Tk 10 to 20 per kilogram in the city's kitchen markets.

Eggs, which would have cost somewhere between Tk 48 to 50 a dozen depending on whether it was from the poultry farm or of local variety, in the beginning of this month, now sell at Tk 50 to 54, said an egg trader at Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

Green chili was Tk 25 to 30 per kilogram a few weeks ago. But now it has shot up to Tk 40 at Shantinagar, Hatirpul, Fakirerpul and Karwan Bazar kitchen markets. Good quality locally produced lentils cost Tk 45 to 46 per kg at present in the retail market. It had been fluctuating between Tk 38 to 42 about two weeks ago.

Local onion is now Tk 22 per kg rising from Tk 18 in the first week of this month. The Indian variety, which was Tk 14 per kg, is selling at Tk 16.

Local and imported ginger now cost Tk 65 and 70 per kg respectively although it had been Tk 50 and 40 not too long ago. Local turmeric is Tk 65 per kilo, a ten Taka jump. Per kg red pepper sells at Tk 65 to 80. It was between Tk 50 to 65 a month ago.

Prices of different varieties of rice too have gone up by two to three Taka. Minikat is Tk 19 per kg while Nazirshah is 18 Taka. Sugar was Tk 30 but now selling at Tk 31 to 32 in the retail market.

While per kg lady's finger, bitter gourd and brinjal were priced at Tk 32, 24 and 28 respectively inside the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) market in Karwan Bazar, the same

items were found selling at Tk 16 barely a hundred yards away in the roadside market. Even two weeks ago, lady's finger and brinjal would have cost Tk 10 to 12 per kilo.

While a number of retailers at Karwan Bazar said that the wholesalers were to blame for manipulating the price, the wholesalers claimed that it was due to shortage of supply, communication disruption and also because most of the production units' have gone under underwater.

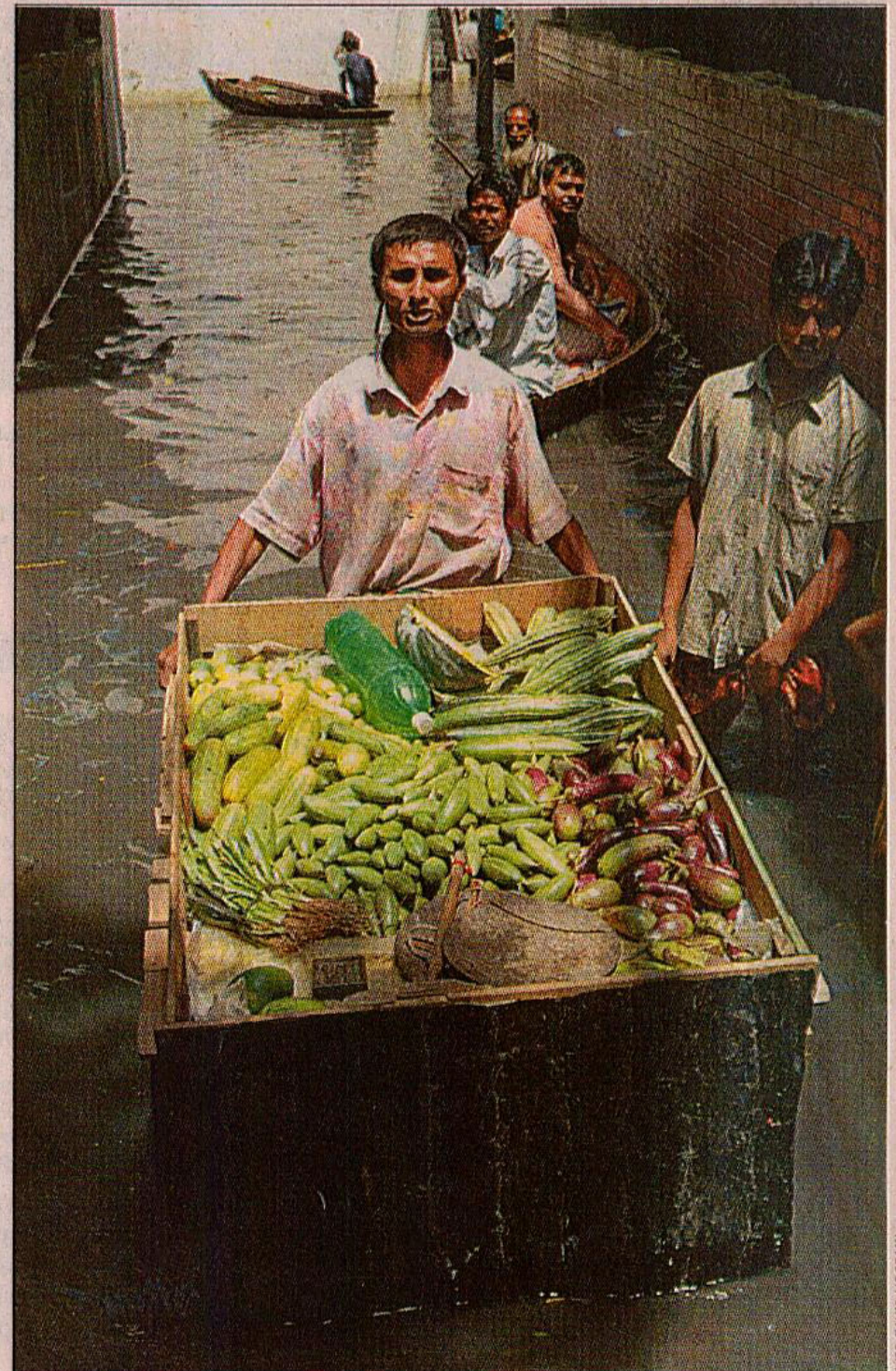
"Situation in the essential commodity market is unbelievable. Prices of all the vegetables and spices have gone up by Tk 4 to 10," said Zaheda Begum, a housewife while shopping at Karwan Bazar. Many others echoed the same sentiment.

"This is an unethical practice of the unscrupulous section of the business community. They create situations for price hike whenever they get an opportunity," said Quazi Faruque, general secretary of Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

Termining the price hike of onion and edible oil in recent past as syndicated price manipulation, Faruque said that the current flood situation in the country has got nothing to do with the price hike of eggs and sugar. He refuted the commerce minister's reported satisfaction over market price situation.

"There is no mechanism at the moment to instantly protect the consumers," said commerce secretary Aminur Rahman. "But we have appealed to the business community not to exploit consumers during a distressful situation like flood. Besides, we are rather apprehensive that the business community might resort to adverse measures in case we interfere in the market," he added.

The secretary said that the consumer protection act, draft of which is ready, will be placed at a cabinet meeting soon and then tabled during the next parliament session.



A vegetable vendor at flood-hit Goran.



Diarrhoea patients at ICDDR,B.