



Hungry villagers in Bogra scramble for relief that has long eluded them.

swathe that caused the devastating flood. The report also blamed the alleged saboteurs with links to two pro-BNP groups contractors for cutting the dam open.

Pitiably, while 3,000 people moved onto higher ground after having lost everything they possessed, government response to the emergency situation was lukewarm. One day after the incident, BBC Radio reported that the army was called out to the flood-affected areas. But the local administration and police could not confirm it. In fact the Officer in Charge, Zulfiker Ali, bluntly said to a reporter on the night of July 15 that he had not hear about such a decision.

It was not until July 17 that the reports could catch up to the scale of devastation resulting from the embankment breach. A *Daily Star* report put the figure of marooned people to 5.5 lakh. Three days went by without retrieval of the six bodies that had washed away on that fateful night. Another 60 people who went missing remained so as no search drive was conducted.

While BNP and the local authorities were trying their best to prove that it was not an act of sabotage, the reports in most dailies confirmed that it was. A *Prothom Alo* report said that the conflict between Belal Hossain Babu and Jahurul Islam Nannu, the two BNP leaders, caused this breach in the dam that took a heavy toll on lives and property. Rashedul Islam, an ASO of the Water Development Board (WDB) filed a case with the Dhunat thana. In the FIR he clearly stated the reason to be an act of sabotage. As for the two BNP leaders, they were as usual pointing to each other and were also trying to raise an accusing finger to the WDB officials. Many villagers

were of the opinion that it is to frame Nannu, Babu, the Chairman, has made his men do this. This was the local scenario; on the national level the Deputy Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Asadul Habib Dulu asked the WDB officials to retract their comment.

While talking to journalists at Bogra Circuit House on July 15, the deputy minister confirmed that "the embankment wrecked in a natural process". But this did not deter the WDB officials from repeating the fact that a vested quarter had cut the dam open, which clearly was an act of sabotage. Dhunat Sub-Division Engineer Mosharraf Hossain told newsmen that the point in question was not so weak that it would break down naturally. The WDB board officials said that there were 30 vulnerable points on the embankment that stretches 262 kilometres from the northern district of Kurigram to Pabna, "but none of them broke".



Their villages inundated after saboteurs cut open the dam at Dhunat upazila, these villagers plod through waist-deep water in search of jobs or to trade rice.

The local lawmaker Golam Mohammad Siraj put a different twist to the whole affair. His contradictory statement cleared the cloud that many were set to create. He first said that the feud did not lead to the sabotage but delayed the repair and then he went on to add, "The sabotage would not have taken place if the WDB had allowed Babu to do the (repair) work."

Imagine a small feud over the contract of repair work leading to a huge disaster; this can happen only in Bangladesh. Moreover, the dreadful reality is that, persons who are willing to doggedly pursue their personal and petty interest by endangering lives of a huge population ride power year after year without having to account for their misdeeds.