

Unprotected Patuakhali

100 km dam washed away: District town, 10,000 acre cropland go under 3-4 feet water during high tide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Patuakhali is virtually unprotected now as about 100 kilometre embankments have eroded into rivers and another about 200 kilometres are seriously damaged.

Besides vast croplands in the seven upazilas, two-thirds of Patuakhali town are inundated by water during high tide as all the rivers swell.

Most of the erosion in embankments took place during monsoon this year and last year, according to Water Development Board (WDB) officials.

The situation will be precarious in the next monsoon if the embankments are not repaired on emergency basis, they said. Aman sowing is being affected in about 10,000 acres of land now because of inundation, they said.

The officials said they have sent proposals involving Tk 17 crore to higher authorities for repair of the embankments, at least top keep the lands suitable for rice cropping.

The eroded embankments include 35 kms in Bara Baiohdia in Galachipa, 25 kms in Rangopaldi union in Dashmia upazila, 20 kms in Muradia union in Dumki upazila, 10 kms in Char Bestin and five kms in Char Montaz.

There are about 1200 km WDB embankments in the coastal district to protect it from flood and tidal surge.

They said they initiated repair of 48 km embankments some years back. But the project is half-done due to fund shortage.

WDB Executive Engineer Abdul Mazid Mollah told this correspondent at his office on Tuesday that he sent many reminders to higher authorities



PHOTO: STAR

Bonik Potty area of Patuakhali town snapped during hightide on August 22.

for allocation of funds on an emergency basis to repair the damaged embankments, but to no effect.

Two-thirds area of the district town go under water during high tide, mainly in the wet season from June to October. The most vulnerable areas included Puran Bazar, Chalk Bazar, Kath Patti, Nabab Para, Shimul Bagh, Mushim Para, College Road, Sadar Road, Post Office Road, Munsef Para, where 3 to 4 feet water remains stagnant for a day after the tide.

About 40,000 people of these areas suffered a lot as water inundates most of the houses.

"I cook (food) during low tide and fed my children and husband during high tide", housewife Putul in Nabab Para joked while talking to this correspondent.

"Because my kitchen is inundated during high tide". There are many who follow Putul. Patuakhali river on the north and Hohalia river on the east. Waters from the rivers roll into the town whenever they rise.

The town protection embankment-cum drainage project, taken-up seven years ago, is yet to be implemented.

The Tk 17.27 crore project was taken up after the visit of the then agriculture minister Majid-ul Hque to Patuakhali in 1997.

The project includes construction 4.20 km flood control embankment and one km wall and installation of seven sluice gates and four power pumps in 38 outlets.

The Water Resources Ministry okayed the project in 2001 but it is awaiting approval by the ECNEC (Executive Committee of National Economic Council, WDB sources said.

Clash over political talks by Jamaat at mosque: 6 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A tense situation is prevailing in Satami area in the Sadar upazila following a clash on Thursday between Muslim devotees and some Jamaat-e-Islami activists at a mosque, in which six persons were injured.

The muazzin (who calls for prayer) of Satani Bazar mosque, Magfur Rahman, was among the injured in the clash that ensued when devotees protested political discussion by Jamaat activists. Two of the injured including a Jamaat activist have been admitted to Satkhira hospital.

Sources claimed that the secretary of the mosque committee went to Satkhira thana to lodge a case but police declined to record it due to alleged political pressure.

Police recorded a case against nine people including the secretary, the sources claimed.

On the other hand, local Jamaat leaders have convened a protest meeting at Satani Bazar tomorrow.

Govt won't resign: Altaf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury on Thursday said the government will not resign on the recent bomb blast issue.

He told this while addressing a meeting at Ward No 7 in Patuakhali pourasabha.

He said former Awami League (AL) government did not resign although bomb blasts happened at Ramna batumal on April 14 in 2001 and at Narayanganj the same year. Even no fair investigation was made during the AL regime.

Poura commissioner Monirul Alam, advocate Alomgir Hossain, Golam Kibria, also addressed the meeting.

Arsenic levels in Barisal division alarming

10,000 affected, 32 die in 5 years: Even deep tube wells contaminated at places

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barsial

Arsenic contamination of groundwater is alarming in Barisal with about 10,000 people affected.

At least 32 people died of arsenicosis in five years.

Even water of deep tubewell is contaminated with the deadly poison at places, according a recent survey jointly done by the NGO Forum and the Dhaka Community Hospital.

Of the dead, 22 are in Barisal Sadar, eight in Babuganj and two in Agailjhara upazilas in the district.

The survey identified 334 arsenicosis patients only in Babuganj upazila.

Conditions in the Sadar, Hizla and Muladi upazilas are similar, it said.

Water of most of the shallow tube wells in the areas is contaminated with arsenic, which has affected a large

number of people in different areas of the district.

Conditions in Bhola and Patuakhali districts are no better.

Arsenic has also been found in at least 24 deep tube wells in Barisal division -- 18 of those in Barisal, five in Bhola and one in Pirojpur.

All shallow tube wells are arsenic-contaminated in 200 villages in 40 upazilas in Barisal division, the survey revealed.

Presence of arsenic is "alarmingly high" in some of the shallow tube wells.

According to statistics, there are 16, 776 deep and 50,153 shallow tube wells in ten upazilas of Barisal district. These were sunk by the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), different NGOs and by private users to ensure safe drinking water.

The deep tube wells found contami-

nated include those at Shahid Zia College in Nazirpur; Proshika office in Sahakati; Mahmudia Madrasa and Koira High School in Charbaria in Barisal Sadar upazila and at several houses in Uzirpur and Babuganj upazilas.

Arsenic has also been found beyond the permissible level in some of the deep tube wells sunk in Gazaria, Daulatkhan and Chafession upazilas in Bhola district.

Once people were motivated by NGOs and different government agencies to use groundwater for safety. People are confused now as they are advised to use surface water again.

Iswardi AL, BNP leaders held, arms recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) on Friday night arrested five persons including Iswardi BNP president, a ward commissioner and an Awami League leader and recovered arms and ammunition from them.

The arrested are Iswardi BNP president and former upazila chairman Mokhesur Rahman Bablu, his younger brother JCD leader Rezaul Karim Sahun, Iswardi Chamber of Commerce vice-president and poura Awami League president Iunus Ali Mintu and Kushtia Municipal Ward Commissioner Alek Mahamud.

One "Tiger Alam" of Lakshampur district and

Amanullah alias Buro were also arrested.

Police said a Rab team from Rajshahi raided the house of BNP leader Mokhesur Rahman Bablu at Loksed area in Iswardi and arrested Bablu, Sahin, Alek and Tiger Alam while they were holding a "secret meeting" there.

Rab recovered one pistol and some ammunition from their possession.

Police said Alek had gone to the BNP leader's houses a day before the arrest but could not ascertain why he went there.

Kushtia police said Alek was a "listed

criminal" accused in three cases filed with the Sadar police station.

Another source said Alek fled from Kushtia town and took shelter at the house of Iswardi BNP leader Bablu when Rab launched its operation in Kushtia.

A Rab team also raided the house of Iunus Ali Mintu at College Road and arrested him. Later Rab recovered a rifle from his family graveyard.

Rab handed all of them to police, which produced them before a Magistrate court. The court sent them to Pabna jail.

782 km roads damaged in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Flood has damaged about 782.65 kilometre roads in the district incurring a loss of Tk 13 crore 26 lakh 50 thousand, according to LGED (Local Government Engineering Department), here.

Flood also damaged 69 bridges and culverts and the loss has been estimated at Tk 2 cr 78 lakh. Loss in damage in three growth centres has been estimated at Tk 25 lakh. About 239 buildings and structures were ruined by the deluge incurring a loss of Tk 2 cr 85 lakh.

Besides, 16 village markets have been damaged. The loss has been estimated at Tk 47 lakh. Roadside trees worth Tk 25 lakh have been uprooted during the deluge.

Total loss due to damage in roads, culverts, growth centres and village markets has been estimated at Tk 19 cr 87 lakh, according to LGED.

Meanwhile, the Roads and Highway Department here has estimated a loss of Tk 2 cr due to damage in seven highways. These are Rangpur-Bogra Highway, Gai-bandha-Fulchhari Road, Gaiban-dha-Balashi Road, Dariapur-Kamarjani Road and Gobindaganj-Ghoraghat Road.

Three stabbed in B'baria JCD-BCL clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A tense situation is prevailing in the hartal-bound district town following Saturday's clash between activists of Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL) and Jatiotabadi Chatra Dal (JCD) and bomb blasts in several areas of the town.

JCD Joint Secretary Mamun and party activists Didar and Jumman were critically stabbed and BCL leader Jalal Hossain Khukan was injured in the sporadic clashes that lasted till 10 pm on Saturday. The JCD activists were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital. Critically injured Mamun and Didar were sent to Dhaka.

According to eyewitness and police sources, the clashes ensued when BCL activists chased students at Brahmanbaria Government College to compel them not to attend classes in view of the BCL-called countryside strike in educational institutions [protesting the grenade attack on Awami League rally in Dhaka.

JCD activists resisted the BCL men on the campus. During the clash, some youths broke furniture at the students' union office.

Police rushed there, arrested three BCL workers---Shuhag, Ahsan and Parves--- and sued them under the Speedy Trial Act. Clashes marked with bomb blasts spilled to other areas in the town including Colegepara, Power House Road, Market Murali, Kandi Para, Farooki Market Point and Kachari Pookurpar in the evening.



PHOTO: STAR

The ravaging floods have left roads in Fulchhari upazila headquarter virtually unusable.

SNAPS

Three 'listed criminals' held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police on Friday night arrested three "listed criminals" from Jhenidah Sadar and Kaliganj and recovered five firearms and ammunition from their possession. Kaliganj police raided Arpara village and arrested Mokhesur Rahman along with a pistol, a pipe gun and 6 bullets. Police then arrested one Sahajahan from Dadpur village and recovered one pistol and one shutter gun. In another raid, the Jhenidah Sadar police arrested one Raza from Hiradanga village along with a pipegun.

Fertiliser dealers held in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Police, led by a Magistrate, arrested two fertiliser dealers for selling urea at high price in Gaibandha Sadar and Sadullapur on Friday. They are Abu Baker Mia and Badal Mia. They were selling urea at Tk 325 to 350 per 50 kg bag instead of the government-fixed price of Tk 290. On getting the information, Magistrate Kamrul Hasan raided their shops and arrested them. Two cases have been filed.

Peanuts bring smiles

Educated youth Ali earns up to Tk 2.5 lakh a year from 20 acres

HOSSAIN SERAJ, Magura

Once jobless, educated youth Mohammad Ali is now well off by peanut cultivation.

He earns up to Tk 2.5 lakh a year from peanut on 20 acres of shoal land near Madhumati river in Magura. He has been growing the crop for the last five years.

Elders son of the family, Ali now maintains his old parents and seven brothers and sisters. His success is a topic of discussion for many in Magura.

Ali, now 25, son of Meer Hafizur Rahman of Khondo-Kasundi village, had passed HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) examination in 1998.

As usual for a poor family, he had to

stop studies and look for job. He spent about one year in search of job. By this time, his younger brothers Amir and Alauddin had stopped going to school, he said.

Finding no job to subsidise the family income, he decided to take to farming.

"Arif tried to work as a farmer. But it was hard for him to do the job," Ali told this correspondent during a recent visit to his house.

One day, Ali came in contact with local AED (Agriculture Extension Department) officials. Knowing his interest in farming, they encouraged him to cultivate peanuts in fertile alluvial shoal lands and assured him assistance.

Ali cultivated nuts on one acre of family land in the shoal area in 1999 and earned about Tk 14,000.

Being inspired, Ali leased more lands.

"Next year I earned about Tk 28,000, which was beyond my imagination.

"I invested Tk 20,000 to lease more land and cultivate peanuts.

"Now I grow peanuts on 20 acres round the year and employ at last ten people to help me. Managing crops on 20 acres is a gigantic task, specially during sowing and harvesting".

Peanuts can be grown three times a year. Ali produces 1000 to 1200 maunds of peanut in a year, Ali said.

"My sale proceeds vary from Tk two lakh to Tk 2.5 lakh in a year because

prices fluctuate", he said.

"My younger brother Alauddin passed SSC examination this year," a proud Ali said.

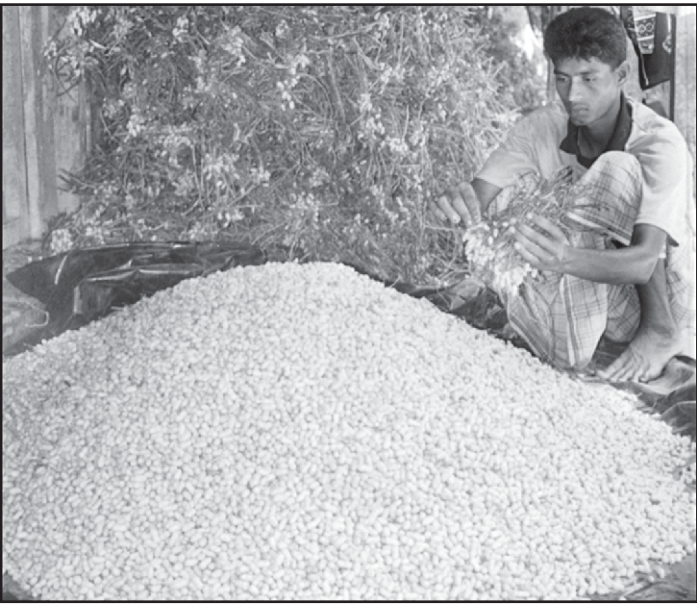
He said, he had marketing problems at the beginning.

"Now traders come to my house and by nuts", a smiling Ali said.

The educated farmer now thinks to rotate crops. With the assistance of AED officials, he is now examining the possibility of growing other crops including potato.

AED officials' initiatives have brought slimes on many faces in the village.

Monirul, Dabir, Atiar, Masud, Hasib and Bakar now cultivate peanuts commercially.



Mohammad Ali with a heap of peanuts (left) and labourers harvesting the crop from shoal lands near the Modhumati (right).



PHOTO: STAR

Abducted youth not rescued in 73 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A young businessman abducted 73 days back from Uttar Baraid village in Saturia upazila is yet to be rescued.

The victim is Sohel Pervez, 20, a poultry businessman and son of Md Habibur Rahman of Akashi village in the same upazila.

On June 15, Sohel was abducted from the house of Zahngir, 25, son of Koran Ali of Uttar Baraid village when he demanded his loan money back from him.

Md Habibur Rahman filed an abduction case with Saturia Police Station on June 29 accusing Younus Ali, Zahangir and Gutu Mia.

Habib came to Manikganj Press Club on Tuesday and complained to journalists that his son's abductors had been demanding ransom from him.

Meantime, Habib announced to give a reward of Tk 1,00,000 in exchange of his son's rescue.

He lamented real culprit Zahangir is yet to be arrested.

'Arms smuggling' thru' CHT: Probe demanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Criminals are smuggling arms, grenades and ammunition through Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Awami League (AL) leader and a lawmaker from Bandarban constituency Bir Bahadur MP told this at a press conference at the local Awami League office on Thursday.

He demanded a thorough investigation into it.

He feared there might be a lot of ammunition in the region although security personnel recovered 576 grenades and huge firearms last year.

Meanwhile, different quarters here have demanded an investigation to locally recovered grenades so that it can

be detected whether same grenades were thrown at the AL rally in Dhaka or not.

A three-member arms expert team from the United States already visited Naikhangchari border in Bandarban on March 2. The experts examined recovered arms and ammunition including grenade, anti-tank mine, mine, M-79, M-16, AK-47 and a huge number of explosives and visited different arms smuggling routes.

Sources in Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) said that they have only two border posts along 172-kilometre border area with Mayanmar. They have no control over the Sangu and Rayingkhang forest areas in Rangamati district, BDR sources said.

Law and order reviewed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A meeting to review crime situation was held here at the conference room of the police super (SP) of Brahmanbaria on Thursday.

Brahmanbaria SP ATN Tarek presided over the meeting.

Additional Police Super Md Taherair Hossain, ASP (Circle Sadar Kamruzzaman, ASP (circle) Md Abdul Mabua, DB OC M Safiuzzaman, Brahmanbaria Thana Officer-in-Charge (OC) Md Ismail, Banchharampur Thana OC Md Shah Alam, Kasba Thana OC Gulam Muhammad, Akhaura Thana OC Abdus Salam, Ashuganj Thana OC Ali Azam, Nasirnagar Thana OC Nazrul Islam, Sarail Thana OC Md Rafiqul Islam, Nabinagar Thana OC Regaul Karim, RI Nazrul Islam, District Traffic Inspector Md Shahjahan Ali and DSB Sub-inspector Maynuddin Khan were present in the meeting.