

GAIBANDHA TORNADO-HIT AREAS REVISITED

Hundreds still under open sky, survival their prime concern

REZAUL HOQ, Gaibandha

Normalcy is still far away in the tornado ravaged areas in Gaibandha district even after a fortnight of the incident. Several hundred people are still under the open sky and a large number of students are deprived of schooling as their schools were razed to the ground.

The authorities have neither taken any step to rebuild the damaged schools and madrassas nor made alternative arrangements for their schooling.

During a visit to the areas yesterday and the day before, this correspondent saw most of the affected people could not yet erect makeshift sheds. Many of them said they did not get any CI sheet to raise sheds.

It was gathered that about 1250 families have been provided with two bundles of CI sheet each and 4,715 are still left out.

The government allocated 2,600 bundles CI sheets for the tornado victims, which is too inadequate to the need, sources including local body leaders said.

Some people were seen sheltered under polythene sheds fixed on

cane structures, only to protect themselves from sun and rain.

About 1400 families are sheltered temporarily in 500 tents supplied by the district administration. Three or more families are huddling under each tent. Those who could not manage a big polythene sheet or avail the chance to get into a tent are under the open sky.

While visiting Dakkhin Shabaj village under Sarbanado union on Monday, a number of affected people complained that they have not yet received any CI sheet or house building grant, other than 20 kilograms of rice.

Over 800 families in this village were made homeless by the tornado but only 150 got CI sheets. Arranging a meal in a day is their prime concern now, they said.

"We are four families in a tent. We shelter only our children inside", said Jobeda Begum, a housewife in Dakkhin Sahabaj village.

Seventy year-old Sakhina of Nayapara village said, "I don't know why I did not get any house building material".

Quddus Ali of the same village

said sheltering the women and children from rain and sun is his prime concern. He did not get any CI sheet.

A total of 14.20 km power line has been destroyed by the tornado in three unions. PDB and Palli Bidhut Samity (Rural Electrification Board) men are working to restore power supply.

IRRI-Boro crops in the areas are being affected for want of power as 30 transformers were damaged by the tornado.

According to a field survey conducted by local NGO Gano Unnayan Kendro, tornado damaged 2,814 thatched huts, 5,852 tin-shed houses, 120 buildings and 1,305 tube-wells.

The tornado completely damaged six high schools, four madrasas and 17 primary schools in Dhopadanaga, Sarbnada and Naldanga unions in Sadaullapur upazila alone. At many places there is not even a sign of school as the tornado blew away its roofs, fencing and furniture, said Sadullapur UNO Farid Ahmed.

At least 15 school children died in the tornado and over 100 others were injured. Nine of them are still being

treated at makeshift medical centres.

About 7,850 school children lost their books and education equipment.

The UNO said of the affected students, at least 4000 are from utrapoor families, who cannot afford to buy books and equipment now.

"We are not thinking about education of children as survival is our prime concern now", said Abul Kalam of Khamar Dashedia village.

"It will not be possible to arrange books for the tornado hit areas. However, we will try to manage the problem, but it will take time", said District Education Officer Azher Ali.

"The damaged schoolhouse should be rebuilt immediately. Otherwise the number of dropout students will increase", said Abul Hossain, Headmaster of Khanmar Dashedia High School.

"But we can not say when my school will be rebuilt", said Abul Basher, Headmaster of Kismat Haldia High School.

Patuakhali WDB office reopens under police protection

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

All rooms except that of the Executive Engineer were seen open and officials working at Patuakhali Water Development (WDB) office yesterday.

Two policemen were seen on the compound when this correspondent visited the office at about 11 am. Police have been deployed so that none can create any problem, an official said.

The Executive Engineer did not come to office. "He (Executive Engineer) has gone to Dhaka for official work", the official said.

The Executive Engineer is not seen at the office since March 31 after allotment of work to contractors, allegedly done in an irregular way.

A good number of WDB-enlisted contractors on Monday demonstrated on the office compound protesting the irregularities. But none of them was seen at the office yesterday.

Some of the contractors later told this correspondent that they would hold a press conference at the Press Club today.

Party men demand Manikganj Jubo Dal leaders' arrest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Over 2000 leaders and activists of ruling BNP and its front organisations yesterday brought out a procession in the district town demanding arrest of the Jubo Dal district unit president Motalab Hossain and secretary ASM Iqbal Hossain for their alleged corruption.

They also demanded cancellation of the Manikganj district of Juba Dal unit, formed in a council held on September 23, 2003.

The procession started from in front of Nurul Hossain Law Academy, paraded the streets of Manikganj town and terminated in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office premises where a rally was held.

Former lawmaker and BNP leader Advocate Abdul Wahab Khan presided over the rally, addressed by, among others, BNP leader and public Prosecutor (PP) Azad Hossain Khan, Bar Association President Rahmat Ali, former Manikganj Juba Dal President Aatur Rahman, Khandaker Abdul Hamid Dablu, former Manikganj Jatigatabadi Samajik Songskritik Sangstha leader Asaduzzaman, former Manikganj JCD secretary Golam Rafi Apu, Municipal Commissioner Mejbahul Haque and Imrul Alam Sabuj.

They said the Juba Dal president and secretary with the help of same musclemen are collecting illegal toll and are involved in various crimes including tender snatching.

The leaders sought intervention by central Jubo Dal leaders to cancel the committee that is "damaging" the party image in the district.

They also sought intervention by BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia and its First Joint Secretary Tareque Rahman to form a new Manikganj district BNP committee.

Spurious fertiliser: Farmer sued, not trader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

A farmer has been sued, not the trader, in an incident of recovery of adulterated fertiliser in Kishoreganj upazila.

Farmer Laizul Islam is now in jail but the trader is absconding.

A Nilphamari court sent him to jail as he appealed for bail on April 2.

Laizul of Panial Pukur Moulvibazar village in Kishoreganj upazila had bought 14 bags of NPKS (Nitrogen, Phosphate, Potash and Sulfate) fertiliser from dealer Rafiqul Islam's shop— Messers Rupali Traders" at Kishoreganj town on September 8 last year.

Laizul's relatives told this correspondent during a recent visit to the village that after some days when he began to use the fertiliser in his potato fields, he found it adulterated and mixed with red

brick particles, cow dung and other spurious substances.

He then informed Rafiqul Islam, who asked him to bring back all the 14 bags to his shop.

As Laizul was bringing back the bags in two rickshaw vans on September 14, Constable Sawkat Ali of Kishoreganj thana seized the bags and took those to custody, along with him.

Laizul told police that he bought the fertiliser from Rupali Traders.

Meanwhile the trader closed his shop and fled away.

Police lodged a general diary (GD) on the same day and requested the Upazila Agriculture Officer in writing to test the seized fertiliser.

The agriculture officer got it tested at the Soil Development Institute laboratory in Dhaka. The report sent to the upazila agriculture office on November 1 last year said the fertiliser was adulterated.

ated. Upazila Agriculture Officer Fazlul Haque, after a long delay, filed a case in January this year with Kishoreganj thana.

Investigation officer (IO) Sub-inspector Mujibur Rahman, filed a charge sheet with a First Class Magistrate court in Nilphamari on February 28.

In the report the IO said the fertiliser supplied by the dealer "seemed to him to be good". Farmer Laizul adulterated it to put the dealer in trouble, it said.

When contacted, Kishoreganj thana OC Abdul Mannan said Laizul should have returned the fertiliser immediately but he did so after eight days. "This is suspicious". He said Laizul is also a small fertilizer trader, but could not show the farmer's trade license.

Laizul's family said that he (Laizul) bought 14 bags of fertiliser at a time to avoid price rise in peak season.

Chicken pox kills 2, afflicts 200

Situation under control, says Mymensingh Civil Surgeon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two persons died from chicken pox and over 200 are now attacked with the disease in Hasanpur, Tatrakanda and Charanipara villages in Gouripara upazila in the district.

The dead have are Md Nurul Islam, a Union Parishad member from Charanipara village and Dr Abdul Mannan, 55, a quack in Hasanpur village, who died on March 10 and March 31 respectively.

Many people have left the villages fearing an epidemic of the disease, local people said.

The disease first broke out at Charanipara village and then spread

to the neighbouring two villages rapidly as the local health workers did not take prompt steps to contain the disease, they alleged while talking to this correspondent.

Some of the patients are being treated at the health complex and at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH).

Another five patients have been released from MMCH after treatment at the Surjo Kanta (SK) Hospital, a unit of MMCH for treatment of infectious diseases.

Talking to this correspondent on Monday, Dr Md Abdul Kader at SK Hospital confirmed that the disease is chicken pox, not small pox, as

reported in some newspapers. Asked about the deaths, he said the disease may turn fatal if not treated properly and promptly.

Chicken pox may lead to pneumonia and viral encephalitis causing respiratory problems and death, he said.

Mymensingh Civil Surgeon Dr Ruhul Amin Khan also confirmed that the disease is chicken pox, not small pox.

There is no reason to be panicked about this disease because the situation is under control in the affected villages.

Doctors and health workers are in the affected area, he said.

Anti-smoking law hailed in B'baria

DC, SP lead colourful procession in support

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

People brought out a colourful procession in Brahmanbaria town yesterday hailing the government for enacting a law banning smoking in public places.

It was organised by Brahmanbaria Dhuppan O Madak Birudhi Sangathan (an organisation against drug use and smoking).

The processionists paraded different roads carrying banners and posters and chanting various slogans against drug use and smoking.

They also urged the government to enact tougher anti-drug law to curb its use.

The procession was led by Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner (DC) Md Jahirul Haque, Police Superintendent (SP) ATM Tareque, Pourasabha Chairman Md Hafizur Rahman Mulla Kachi, and the Sangathan's President Advocate Tanbir Bhuiyan.

Vice-presidents of the Sangathan Abul Fayiz, Fazlul Karim, Khaza Mainuddin, its secretary freedom fighter Md Zamal Uddin, joint secretary Md Hanif, Brahmanbaria Bar Association Secretary Advocate Habibullah, Press Club President Md Monsur Kamal, District Juba Unnayan Officer Md Mizanur Rahman, SSIT Chief Matin Ahmed, UCC Chief Mawlana Mizan-bin-Azim, local daily Dainik Prajbandhu Editor Md Muhibur Rahman were also in the procession.

A large number of officials from different government departments, students and freedom fighters also

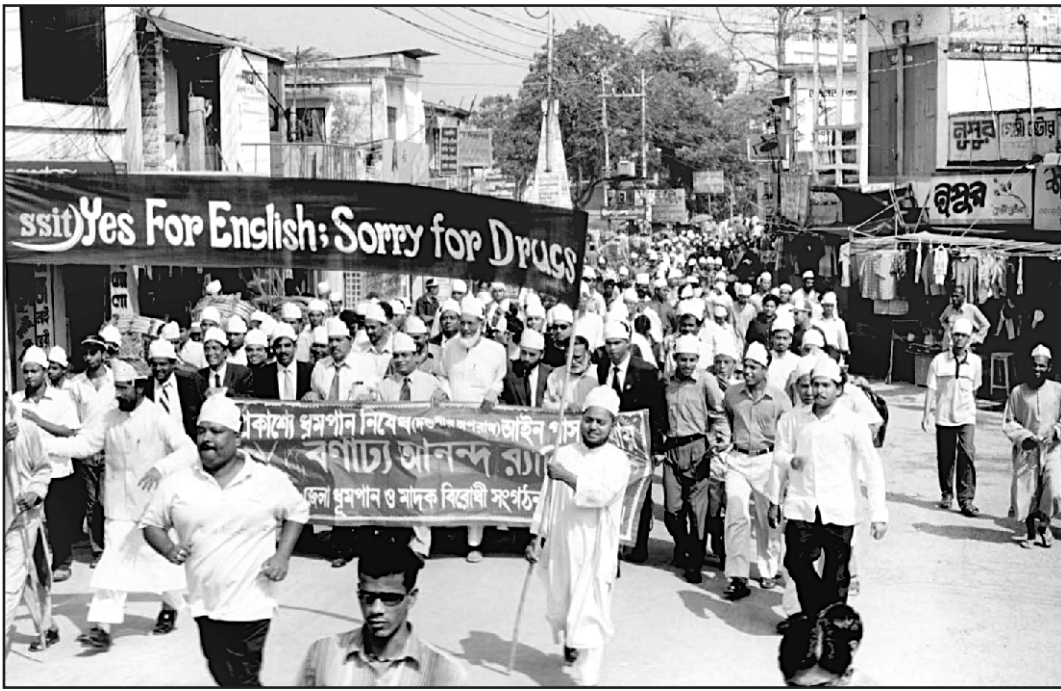


PHOTO: STAR

People spontaneously joined a procession in Brahmanbaria town yesterday hailing the law banning smoking in public places and demanding tough laws against drug pegging.

joined the procession that started from Abdul Kuddus Makhani Mukta Manch. It terminated in front of Zila Parishad Auditorium.

A road side meeting marked the programme, where speakers urged the district administration to remove from streets all signboards and billboards advertising different

brands of cigarette and Bidi.

They urged the administration and the police to take stern action against drug peddlers and smoking in public places. If drugs are not available, their use will come down, they said.

The speakers called upon the townspeople not to allow smoking at

public places.

After the procession, harmful affects of smoking and drug use were blared over microphones in different areas of the town.

As the procession passes by, people on both sides of roads clapped and greeted them for the good initiative.



PHOTO: STAR

Recipients of RHDC stipends with Maniklal Dewan at a photo session.

303 get HDC stipends in Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC) has awarded stipends and certificates to 303 primary school students in the district for good academic performance.

RHDC Chairman Dr Maniklal Dewan gave the awards at a function held at the RHDC auditorium on Monday.

Fifty students got Tk 600 each

under 'talent pool' scholarship and 253 got Tk 400 each under 'general stipend'. They were selected from among 3000 students from 632 primary schools in the district. RHDC introduced the awards two year ago.

This year, the RHDC spent Tk 3,40,100 for the awards.

The function attended by, among others, officials of RHDC and district primary education.

New Magura AL body formed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

A new committee of Magura district Awami League (AL) was formed at the triennial council, held here on Monday.

The committee is headed by Md Altaf Hossain as president and Prof MS Akber MP as general secretary.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, who attended the council as chief guest, announced the committee after discussion with councilors.

Leaders and activists of AL units welcomed the new committee.

Landless demand khas land in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Landless people held a rally and brought held a procession in Rangpur town yesterday to press their 5-point demand.

Several hundred landless people under the banner of Bhumihin Somiti held the rally at the Public Library ground.

Presided over by Anwar Hossen Bablu, it was addressed by, among others, Abdul Motin Talukder, President of Bangladesh Khetmojur o Krishok Federation and its vice-president Showkot Hossen Ahmed Byron.

The leaders placed their five-point demand and urged the government to take initiatives to allot government lands to the landless in Rangpur and other districts.

The demands also include free distribution of food and medicare services to the landless, permanent solution to munga in northern districts and steps to check price spiral of essentials.

The Anwar Hossen denounced the government for allotting khas lands to well off people instead of the poor and landless.

Abdul Motin said the government is working for rich businessmen and indifferent to the sufferings of the poor and the landless.

After the rally a procession paraded the main roads of the town. It terminated in front of the collectorate building.

They placed a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner to meet the five-point demand.