



A market of old warm clothes in Nilphamari. Most of extreme poor cannot afford to buy a piece even from here.

COLD SPELL IN 8 NORTHERN DISTRICTS

20 lakh extreme poor cry for warm clothes

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

About 19 lakh extreme poor in eight northern districts are struggling to survive the freezing cold where at some places mercury dipped below 5 degree Celsius.

Most of them are landless and homeless people who cannot afford to manage a piece of warm clothe.

According to a survey conducted last year by the Campaign for Assistance, Mobility and Promotion (CAMP), a well-known NGO working in the northern region, the number of extreme poor families in Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Dinajpur, Panchagarh and Thakurgaon districts is 3,94,663. The total members of aforesaid families are 18,56,710 (18.5lakh).

This region is very close to the Himalayan mountains. When the cold wave starts blowing, the lives of such extreme poor family members become extremely miserable.

Moreover, they face Monga, a near famine situation, just before the beginning of the winter every year. Being Monga victims, they do not have stamina to face the biting cold.

Almost all of the family members of the extreme poor families in this region use jute sacks or old torn clothes which cannot protect them from biting cold. At the time of cold wave or excessive cold, such extreme poor families, each having average five members, can not earn more than 35 taka a day, the survey revealed.

With this poor income the mem-

bers of each family can not buy warm clothes after arranging their meal. So they usually try to protect themselves from cold by setting fire to straw, waste paper or old rickshaw tyres. They also use jute sacks and straw quilt (a traditional type of quilt made with straw and sack and used by extreme poor people).

The survey shows that in Panchagarh district , the number of extreme poor families is 28,944 with 1,44,720 family members. The landless and homeless people is 20.1 percent of the population.

In Thakurgaon district, there are 1,58,905 extreme poor people in 31,641 families.

In Dinajpur district, there are 74,424 extreme poor families with 3,72,120 family members. The percentage of landless and homeless people is 13.8.

According to the survey there are 75,776 extreme poor families in Rangpur district and the family members in those families are 3,78,870. There is also 17.5 percent landless and homeless people.

In Gaibandha and Kurigram districts, the number of extreme poor families is 41,364 and 33,840 with family members 2,06,820 and 1,69,200 respectively. The numbers of landless and homeless people in these two districts are 10.8 percent and 18.5 percent.

In Lalmonirhat district, the number of such families is 32,900 and the extreme poor family members are 1,64,500. The number of landless and homeless people in the

district is 17.5.

Similarly in Nilphamari district the number of extreme poor families is 75,774. There are 2,62,275 members in those families. The rate of landless and homeless people is 19.5 percent.

However against 18.5 lakh extreme poor in eight northern districts, the government aid of warm clothes to them is too inadequate. They got only about 40,000 blankets this year.

Last year, a number of NGOs distributed warm clothes among the cold stricken people which met a fraction of total demand. But this year there is no such move yet. The government measures are also not satisfactory.

The Deputy Commissioner of Rangpur, Khondokar Atiar Rahman told newsmen that they are observing the situation while the Deputy Commissioner of Nilphamari Khondokar Moklesur Rahman sent an emergency fax message to Dhaka on Wednesday seeking 10,000 blankets.

BCL founding anniversary

BSS, Rangpur

The 59th founding anniversary of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of Awami League (AL), was observed here on Thursday.

To mark the day, BCL units at district and upazila levels and at different educational institutions brought out colourful processions, rallies and organised discussions.

The main rally and discussion were organised in front of the BCL district office here. Its district unit president Biplob Biswas presided over the discussion.

One killed, 25 hurt in 2 road accidents in Gaibandha

BSS, Gaibandha

A college teacher was killed and 25 persons were injured in two road accidents in Gaibandha on Friday and Wednesday night.

The first accident occurred on the Gaibandha-Sadullapur road at Bashererkola Wednesday night.

Police sources said the victim, Divas Chandra Saha, 40, of Sahapara village of Sadullapur upazila, was a lecturer of Carmichael University College in Rangpur.

They said Divas received serious injury when a rickshaw collided head-on with his motorbike on his way back home from Gaibandha town.

He was immediately rushed to Rangpur Medical College Hospital in a critical condition. Later, he was shifted to Apollo Hospital in Dhaka as his condition deteriorated. He succumbed to his injuries at the hospital.

At least 25 persons were injured, seven of them seriously in another accident at Dakghar point on Dhaka-Gaibandha Highway under Palashbri Upazila on Friday. The accident occurred when a Panchagarh bound BRTC bus coming from Gaibandha collided head-on with a Sundarganj bound night coach.

Police and hospital sources said three of the critically injured were admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital while 22 others to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital and Palashbri Upazila Health Complex, police sources said.

Ensure voting rights of physically challenged, govt & parties urged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said the physically challenged people are deprived of their fundamental rights including right to voting due to lack of government initiatives and indifferent attitude of the political parties.

"The visually impaired people should be given the opportunity to go to the booth with their guide to cast their votes under strict privacy", they said.

On the other hand, those who use wheel chairs should be provided with ramp at the polling centers so that they can cast their vote without any difficulties, they added.

The discussion on 'Electoral Rights for Citizens with Disabilities,' organised by a local NGO-- Disabled Rehabilitation and Research Association (DRRA) was held at local press club premises with Abdul Hakim in the chair.

It was addressed by among others, Anzir Hossain, Lipika Rani, Masura Khatun, Ranajit Barman, SK Siraj and disabled Bipul Biswas.

They also vowed to remove the wrong notions which stand on the way for the rights of the disabled.

The government has taken up a plan for the welfare of the people with disabilities but it is yet to be implemented although the disabled constitute around 10 percent

of total population, they said.

"We want amendment to Bangladesh Disabled Welfare Act 2001 and ratification of the international convention regarding rights of physically and mentally challenged people", said DRRA coordinator Anzir Hossain.

The other speakers urged the political parties to include the rights of the people with disability in their electoral pledge and suggested to the Ministry of the Social Welfare to send proposals to the Election Commission (EC) to ensure their voting rights. They also urged the EC for incorporation and implementation of the proposals.

Physical disability is not a problem. The main problem is

indifference and superstitions about disability and the task of creating confidence among the disabled people, they said.

They said the disabled are not burden, rather they could be turned into human resources if proper training and opportunity are provided to them.

They also called for ensuring the rights of the children with disabilities to education and sought approval of the national action plan at the ministry level in this regard.

They demanded of the government to provide administrative, financial and technical supports for the welfare of the disabled with special attention to physically challenged women.

UPDF enforces blockade in 3 hill dists today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

The United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) will enforce a dawn-to-dusk road blockade in three hill districts of Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban today.

The blockade aims to press their 7-point demand for holding a free and fair election.

The demands include resignation of Prof Iajuddin as caretaker chief, enrolment of permanent citizens of CHT in voter list, introduction of postal ballot system for Bengali settlers including army and para-military force members, stoppage of harassment in name of Operation Uttaran, stoppage of repression by security men on

indigenous people, specially UPDF activists, stoppage of grabbing of land of indigenous people, inclusion of indigenous voters dropped from voter list, deployment of police in polling centres during election and establishment of separate Election Commission for CHT.

UPDF activists brought out a protest procession in the hill town yesterday. Processionists paraded the streets of the town chanting slogans in support of their demands.

Later, a protest meeting was also held at their party office at Narankhaiya. UPDF leader Pradipon Khisha presided the meeting.

Abducted PCJSS man yet to be rescued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

An abducted leader of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) remained untraced 13 days into his abduction from his house allegedly by the armed members of the anti-peace United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) at Golachhari under Rupakari in remote Baghaichhari upazila.

Although the lawenforcers and military personnel conducted several rescue operations in deep forests, they still cannot say whether the PCJSS leader is alive or killed.

Sneh Kumar Chakma, 60, who was a member of CHT Regional Council and an advisor to the PCJSS central committee was

kidnapped by the rival armed members of UPDF from his house on December 24.

The family members of Sneh Kumar are now passing their days in grave concern and uncertainty over his whereabouts.

Earlier, soon after the abduction, PCJSS strongly protested the incident and blamed the anti-peace accord UPDF for the kidnapping and threatened to launch a tougher agitation if the administration failed to rescue their leader without immediately.

'We are now secretly trying to rescue our leader in an alternate way', a PCJSS leader told The Daily Star without giving any details.



Bangladesh Awami Jubo League in Barisal (left) and Nilphamari brought out processions yesterday in support of two-day blockade from today.



PHOTO: STAR

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