

Flood brings deluge of human suffering



SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Forquan Ali, of West Khandakarbari in Badda, is desperately looking for a place to rent because floodwater has inundated his one room house. The water became waist deep almost overnight. Since Forquan could not find an alternative place to live, the family has had to adjust with the floodwater.

The bed has been hoisted above the water level with the help of bamboo poles and ropes. Forquan's father, ailing with jaundice, lies there waiting to be shifted.

His eight-months pregnant wife Josna has moved to her father's place at nearby Fashertek, knowing that the water may force her to move again.

"Today I went to three places looking for a room. Everywhere I went the landlord asked for two months advance. They raised the rental fee too. A room that used to cost Tk2000 is now being rented at Tk3000," said Forquan.

"I really need to move my father to a safe place where I can obtain medical assistance for him, but I am helpless," he added.

Drinking water is an added concern. Since their tube well is under water, potable water has to be fetched from a dry place daily. The family has to cook while standing in the water, while their stove slowly sinks deeper as water continues to rise every night. Nighttime no longer brings peace and rest: they sleep with one eye open out of fear that venomous snakes might crawl up the bed.

"If we cannot find a safe place to move then the only option would be to live on my lady's roof," Forquan said.

In the last few days, floodwater has started to move towards Dhaka city. The eastern part of the city was the first victim of the swelling water due to the absence of a flood control embankment in the area.

Areas like Badda, Basabo, Bonosri, Bashundhara, Shatarkul, Mugda, Nandipara, Trimohini, Rayerbagh, Manda, Maniknagar, Kusumbagh, Debpara and Gulpara in Dhaka have been inundated.

Immense suffering has gushed in along with the raging floodwater. At Shatarkul, Mohammad Faisal has purchased a small boat for his family. Without it, they cannot move even a foot out of their house. His 9-year-old sister goes to school by boat, as the school is still dry and open.

The youngest one of the family, his 3-year-old niece, worries him the most. "There is water everywhere. We are always keeping an eye on her, because we are afraid she may drown," he said.

Laily Begum, marooned at Shatarkul, sent her two sons to

stay at their uncle's house in Malibag because it is really hard for them to go to office from the flooded Shatarkul area. "Moving out of the house for daily business has become impossible," she said.

"Earlier, we built a makeshift bamboo bridge to go to the streets. Now it is almost under water and very risky to use," she added.

Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) predicts that all the rivers around the eastern part, including the Buriganga, Turag, Balu, Shitalakhya will continue to flow above danger levels for the next few days. Hence, there is not likely to be any let-up in the flood situation, or in people's suffering, anytime soon.

Elsewhere, in Commissioner gali at East Bashabo, Lutfur Rahman Majumder dreads a recurrence of the floods of 1988 and 1998. "Last time the sewer water overflowed my house. All the furniture was ruined. It took months to get the house back in shape again," he said.

Majumder is preparing for the flood, which is slowly approaching his neighbourhood. "The water is just around the corner of my street. I went to look into boats because if the water rises, it will be the only option to move about," he said.

Meanwhile, severe crisis of safe drinking water is creating more misery for the marooned people. Diarrhoea patients are swarming the ICDDR,B hospital. Everyday around 500 new patients are coming in. To cope with the extra pressure the hospital authority has set up tents outside the building.

Majority of the patients are coming in from the DND embankment area, as the stagnant water there has become severely contaminated. A mixture of human waste and toxic liquid waste from dyeing factories has made the water extremely poisonous.

The only segment feeling blissful because of the flood is the boat makers. The boat business is thriving as more areas become submerged everyday, leaving more and more people with no option but to resort to boats for travelling.

Boat makers at Aminbazar, Ashuliya embankment, Demra and Kayetpara boat markets are charging around Tk2500 each for boats that usually cost around Tk1500 during the dry season. Boat makers from outside the city are coming in with newly built boats. Kayetpara, the largest boat market of the city, is making a sell of around 100 boats daily.

The boat makers are hoping for further acceleration of the price with rising waters. Meanwhile, all other affected persons are praying that water levels will recede and give them some much-needed respite.



Children and adults in quest of drinking water from Wasa supply lines at Trimohini in Sabujbagh.

Sewage invades Wasa water adding to the miseries in many areas

TAWFIQUE ALI

Drinking water has become contaminated with sewage and dirty water in certain areas submerged in floodwater in the city, said affected residents.

In order to escape the severe water crisis, some of the residents of Madartek, Goran, Nandipara, Trimohini and Bashabo were forced to leave their homes during the past week and stay at relatives' houses.

Residents who remained have been fetching drinking water from other neighbourhoods and coping with the contaminated water for the rest of their daily uses, as regular water supply of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has been polluted by contact

last one week. Several hundred families in the area are faced with the crisis, he said.

"One of my friends, Mujibul Haq Babu, who lives at a place close to Wasa's water pumps at Madartek and Goran, complained last night of contamination in water," said Rahman.

Similar crisis has surfaced in Merul Badda too.

According to a source, the Wasa water supply lines have leakages and cracks at many points, but it is difficult to ascertain their exact locations while they are submerged.

"Contaminated water may easily penetrate into the lines when pressure of water flow is low," said an engineer of Wasa, requesting anonymity.

Shahidur Rahman Pradhan, managing director (in-charge)

anytime circulating through supply net. That apart, the said areas are notorious for illegal water connections with plastic pipes, through which dirty water may easily enter the supply lines.

In fact, the ground floors of many buildings in the said areas are already submerged in floodwater, and underground water reservoirs of private houses might have been contaminated with the dirty water.

As a result, water supply in the entire adjoining area may be polluted, since the supply line is an inter-linked network, said the source.

Executive engineer of Wasa zone-6 RJM Rabul Kaizer said casually, "The matter is too technical to explain instantly, come down to my office sometime."

Executive engineer Md. Saiful Hossain, head of Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC), told The Daily Star that the water level of six rivers including Buriganga, Shitalakhya, Balu, Turag and Tongi canal around the capital city would remain stable during next 24 hours. His prediction was based on analysis of the overall situation upstream and volume of rainfall.

"Water level of the said rivers will definitely start receding from day after tomorrow," said Hossain.

Water in the river Buriganga reportedly flowed 5 centimetres above the danger level yesterday morning. Floodwater started approaching the eastern fringe of the capital city a week back, as water levels of all major rivers surrounding the city continued to swell with receding water from upstream. Three quarters of Bashabo, Nandipara and Trimohini went under floodwater over last week.

Hospital sources said that the number of patients with diarrhoea, cholera and other waterborne diseases is increasing everyday.

To escape the severe water crisis, some of the residents of Madartek, Goran, Nandipara, Trimohini and Bashabo were forced to leave their homes during the past week and stay at relatives' houses

with stagnant floodwater mixed with sewage, said the residents.

The knee-deep stagnant floodwaters have invaded Wasa's water supply lines either through leakages or through underground private water reservoirs, said experts.

A businessman and resident of Madartek Natunpara, Md. Masudur Rahman had to send his wife, daughter and younger brother to his sister's house in Goran area in the face of water crisis. He himself has been surviving at home with drinking water brought from his sister's house.

"The Wasa water, contaminated with water borne sewage, gives bad odour and looks blackish," said Rahman, "It has been unfit for daily uses let alone drinking for more than

of Dhaka Wasa, said, "There is no mechanism to detect cracks and leakages in the supply lines when inundated with floodwater."

"But we have kept all the water pumps running round the clock to keep the water flow strong so that dirty water cannot enter into the supply lines," he said, suggesting that every house owner should take protective measures so that underground water reservoirs at private houses do not get inundated by flood water.

"Contaminated water too can be used, if it is boiled for 30 minutes," said the Wasa MD.

According to a source, Wasa's water supply lines have cracks and leakages, through which filthy water may penetrate and pollute the water



STAR PHOTO

A resident of Badda area sits on his bed amid floodwater (top) while an ailing man gives a blank look as he waits to be shifted to safety.



A family, on boat and raft, leaves for a safe place while another wades through chest-deep floodwater carrying their belongings in Keraniganj, in the outskirts of the city, and (right) Wasa pumps, beside the Rampura Bridge, pumping out floodwater from the area in the Balu River.