

Food crisis looms in Sylhet

4-point proposal by district administration includes immediate start of test relief and distribution of 2.62 lakh VGF cards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A possible food crisis looms in Sylhet as most of the areas in the district were affected by flood, leaving no scope for farmers to grow Aman paddy.

All the six upazilas Benibazar, Zakiganj, Goanghat, Kanaighat, Companyganj and Sylhet Sadar were affected by flood, some of them and some thrice. Ninety-six unions out of 101 in the district were affected, officials said.

The worst affected areas are Benibazar, Zakiganj, Goanghat. Flood water is yet to recede completely from the areas.

The district administration has already sent a 4-point proposal to higher authorities to avoid a possible food crisis in the region in coming months, sources said.

These include immediate start of relief operation, test relief and food for works, distribution of 2.62 lakh VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) cards and post flood rehabilitation.

The administration has also proposed all out assistance to farmers for winter cropping.

Talking to his correspondent Deputy Commissioner Harun Ur Rashid Khan said most areas the district suffered severe floods thrice this year that devastated crops and infrastructures.

Now there is virtually no scope for Aman cultivation and most of the lands will remain fallow till the winter.

He said test relief and food for work programmes should be started as soon as possible.

During a visit to affected areas in Benibazar, Zakiganj, Goanghat many elders said they never experienced such a lengthy flooding in recent times. Farming in the region has been badly affected due to the prolonged floods, which had broken the backbone of farmers, they said.

This may result in a food crisis in the region during coming months, many people apprehend.

Farmers transplanted Aman seedlings twice on their lands, but

those were damaged. Farmers said they do not have any scope to recoup the huge damage as the time for Aman cultivation is almost over. With recession of water, most of the croplands now look barren.

At the beginning of Aman season, seedbeds in most areas were damaged and many farmers did not get the scope for preparing seedbeds again, they said.

According to official estimate, newly transplanted Aman seedlings were destroyed completely on about 55,000 hectares and partially on about 40,000 hectares in the district.

A total of 3,12,000 farmer families have been badly affected in 96 unions.

The third flood this year damaged crops worth Tk 15 crore in the district. This was a heavy blow after the July-August flood that caused a loss of over Tk 10 crore, officials said.

Crops worth over a total of Tk 25 crore were damaged by floods this year. However, unofficial estimates put the damage worth over Tk 100

crore, sources said. The floods also wrought havoc on infrastructures, damaging about 100 kilometres of pucca road, 283 kilometres of kutcha road and 27 kilometres of flood control embankment in the district.

Wazed Ali of Charkhai in Benibazar said most lands in the village are barren as farmers did not have any Aman seedlings. Only a few villagers could sow seedlings they got as relief or assistance from different sources. There is no work in villages now, he said.

Most villagers are worried how to tide over coming months as the last IRRI-Boro crop was also damaged by drought, he added.

Rezu Miah of Moirchabari village in Golapganj said, "Our area normally remains flood free almost every year. But, this year we suffered greatly".

He said farmers transplanted Aman seedlings twice but all are gone now. Such a thing never happened in last 20 years, he said.

Kishoreganj Poura chairman held for bribery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Joint forces yesterday arrested Kishoreganj Poursabha chairman Abu Taher Mia and two other employees of the municipality on charge of taking bribe from a trader.

Arrested Poura employees are surveyor Rukon and assessor Mamun.

Acting on a secret information, a team of joint forces led by first class magistrate Abu Taher Md Sayeed caught them red-handed while taking Tk 20,000 bribe from the businessman named Md Hares Mia of 'Batrisi' area in the town.

Kishoreganj police station officer-in-charge (OC) Abu Md Fazul Karim said the arrested chairman demanded Tk 1.5 lakh bribe from the trader a few days ago on condition of settling a land dispute. When agreed, chairman Taher gave trader Hares a slip for handing over the money to municipality surveyor Rukon.

Accordingly, Hares went to the municipality to hand over Tk 20,000 to Rukon as first installment of the bribe. At that time, joint forces arrested chairman Taher Mia and two others.

Taher was also a BNP nomination seeker in the last parliamentary election.



ASHUGANJ FERTILISER ACC sues 4 CBA leaders

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) in Brahmanbaria has filed four cases against four detained CBA leaders of Ashuganj Zia Fertilizer Factory (ZFCL) for alleged misappropriation of factory funds.

The four accused are ZFCL CBA president Khandaker Muzammel Haque, general secretary Md Farid Uddin, former CBA president Kazi Mujibur Rahman and CBA labour affair secretary Gausur Rahman.

ACC assistant director Shaheen Ara Mamataj in Brahmanbaria filed the cases against them with Ashuganj Police Station on Monday.

The four were arrested by joint force on March 9 from ZFCL colony on charge of irregularities.

According to Brahmanbaria ACC office sources, the four CBA leaders are the third class employees at the factory but they illegally enjoyed facilities more than that of officers.

Using ruling party influence, they misused factory car and realised huge amounts of factory money in the name of fuel cost and drew several lakh taka in the name of overtime duty, the sources said.

Symbolic of a postmaster's toiling life, sculpture 'Runner' was inaugurated on the premises of Nawdapara post office in Rajshahi on the World Postal Day yesterday.

BDR, BSF trade gunfire in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on Monday night traded gunfire on Taluigachha border in Sadar upazila.

The BSF of Tarali camp in Swarnnagar police station under North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal opposite to Taluigachha border fired ten bullets targeting the BDR of Taluigachha camp at about 11:30pm on Monday when the BDR retaliated with ten shots. But no casualty is reported.

On contact, Major Kamrul Hasan, operations officer of 41 Rifles Battalion, confirmed the incident.



With vehicles getting stuck in a three-kilometre-long gridlock at Shepur on Dhaka-Bogra highway, the passengers had to undergo an unpleasant 'waiting test' yesterday.

5 acquitted in child murder case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A court in Barisal on yesterday acquitted five of the six accused in sensational murder case of child Tamim while the judgment about one accused was not declared as the High Court had stayed his trial.

Rabiul Hassan, judge of the Barisal Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal, handed down the verdict after examining 21 witnesses and other pieces of evidence.

The prosecution failed to prove the charges brought against the accused, he said. The acquitted persons are Saiful Islam, Saiful (2), Rehka Begum, Sefali Begum, Jhumur Begum, Kawsar Hossain while the High Court had stayed the trial of Khairul.

Eight-year-old Tamim was murdered at Lalardighi of Rupatali area in Barisal city on May 9, 2004.

Chandpur town protection dam vulnerable

Panicked traders removing goods as cracks appear on embankment

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

Chandpur town protection embankment at Puran Bazar has been threatened due to heavy rain and tremendous pressure of water at the confluence of Meghna and Dakatia rivers.

Concrete cement blocks on a portion of the embankment has been washed away and the dam is vulnerable from Bakalipottit to Old Fire Station point, according to Water Development Board (WDB) officials here.

Cracks have appeared at several points on the embankment along Puran Bazar, creating a panic among the townspeople, locals said. Several buildings are threatened and may collapse

into the river any time, they said.

Some panicked traders in some areas were seen moving goods to safer places yesterday.

Locals alleged that in last 15 years no protected work was done by the concerned authorities to save this part of the town protection embankment.

The erosion took a serious turn in last 2-3 days as concrete blocks were washed away, they said.

The depth of the river at the confluence of the two rivers in about 250 feet and the velocity of river current is tremendous, WDB Executive Engineer En Jibon Krishna Das.

Concrete blocks and sand bags are being dumped on an embankment

gency basis, he said.

To stop further erosion an amount of Tk 8 crore is needed, he said. An urgent message has been sent to higher authorities to take immediate steps to stop the erosion, he added.

Chandpur Chamber of Commerce and Industries President Jahangir Akhand Selim has urged the government to take urgent steps to save the century old town and business center from being devoured by the mighty Meghna.

Deputy Commissioner SM Monirul Islam, Police Superintendent Obaidur Rahman Khan and Pourashava Chairman Nasir Bhuiyan visited the spot yesterday.

A unique punishment for forest plunderers

Offenders have to plant 50,000 saplings they uprooted in Modhupur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The residents of four villages in Madhupur upazila in the district will have to plant 50,000 saplings on 200 acres of forestlands at their own cost within 15 days as penalty for uprooting about the same number of newly planted forest-trees saplings.

This decision was taken at a meeting organised by the local administration and forest department in Madhupur Upazila Nirbahi Officer's (UNO) Office on Sunday.

On September 30, about 300 people of Ragamari, Burakuri, Suralent and Quieral villages under Sholakuri union in the upazila uprooted the newly planted tree saplings on 200 acres of fallen forestlands under Dokhala Range, local administration and forest department sources said.

Later the villagers tried to grab the forestlands but the authorities foiled their attempt, they said.

Forest department, however, desisted from filing any case against the villagers and called them to attend Sunday's meeting.

Divisional Forest Officer in Tangail Abdullah-al-Mamun Chowdhury, Madhupur Upazila Nirbahi Officer MA Parvez Rahim, Assistant Forest Conservator in Madhupur Rabindranath Adhikari and Sholakuri union parishad Chairman Yaqub Ali were present, among others, at the meeting attended by a good number of people of the four villages.

When contacted, Madhupur UNO Parvez Rahim told The Daily Star that they have arranged the 'unique punishment' instead of taking any legal step against the villagers with a view to raising good sense in their mind.

Meanwhile, forest department with the help of local administration and joint forces recovered some 3,600 acres of forestlands in Madhupur and Dhanbari upazilas since February 15 this year.

Fresh flood in Satkhira

12 hurt in Gaibandha storm, houses torn down in Sirajganj

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Six villages in Pratapnagar union under Assassuni upazila flooded as the reconstructed embankment at Harishkhali point on the river Kholpetua breached again on Monday night.

At least 12 people sustained injuries as a six-hour-long storm on Monday night smashed about 200 huts in remote areas of Gaibandha district.

Water level in many chars and low-lying areas on Jamuna basin have swelled again following the incessant heavy rain and several villages in five upazilas in Sirajganj district have flooded.

On September 28, river water overflowed affecting vast areas in Pratapnagar union under Assassuni upazila following embankment collapse at Harishkhali point due to heavy pressure caused by violent tide, our Satkhira correspondent reports.

Army personnel and local administration with the help of people reconstructed the embankment on October 4.

Bainyatala, Kurikaunia, Kalyanpur, Pratapnagar, Moderbaria and, Harishkhali villages have been affected by the fresh flood while water gushing through the breached embankment is inundating new areas.

Over 3,000 people in the areas have been marooned and over 175 families have taken shelter in educational institutions or on high lands.

Standing Aman crops on 2,000 acres of land have been submerged and at least 256 shrimp enclosures in the area washed away, sources said.

The flood-affected people in the union are suffering from scarcity of food and drinking water, Pratapnagar union parishad Chairman Abdul Mannan said.

Water Development Board (WDB) is trying to reconstruct the collapsed embankment but failed due to heavy current in the river, Section Officer of Satkhira WDB Shahidullah said.

Incessant rainfall with gusty wind caused heavy losses to the inhabitants of slums and remote village areas in seven upazilas of Gaibandha district, reports our Gaibandha correspondent.

Power supply remained disrupted for 16 hours as trees fell upon the power transmission line in different areas. Normal power supply was in the district was yet to be resumed as of filing of this report at 6:30pm yesterday.

A number of fruit bearing trees were uprooted due to the storm that continued for long six hours on Monday night. At least 12 peo-

ple sustained injuries as some 200 dwelling huts collapsed.

Life paralysed as most areas of Gaibandha pourashava went under knee-deep water. Rain and stormy weather affected Eid shopping and day labourers and rickshaw pullers, failing to get work, plunged into trouble.

Our Sirajganj correspondent adds: Last two days' heavy rain with stormy wind paralysed normal life in Sirajganj district while hundreds of thatched houses collapsed and trees uprooted in several areas of Raiganj and Tarash upazilas, sources in district administration said.

Many villages in Kazipur, Sirajganj Sadar, Belkuchi, Shahzadpur and Chowhali upazilas flooded as water level on Jamuna basin areas rose.

Heavy rain and gusty wind sweeping on several areas in nine upazilas also damaged newly planted crops.

The District Agriculture Department recorded about 345cm rainfall in last two days. People did not come out of home without an urgent need while movement of vehicles was very low.

Attendance in different government and non-government offices was thin and most of the shops and business centres remained shut.

3 fake hospital technicians held in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Joint forces in special drives arrested three fake technicians from North Bengal Medical College and Hospital in Sirajganj town yesterday morning.

The elite forces also fined the hospital authorities Tk 10,000 for running the institution without proper facilities and other irregularities.

A has been filed against the three arrestees-Lutfar Rahman, Humayun Kabir and Jahidul Islam.

Police said a team of joint forces led by Maj Dr. Khosroz Samad and Capt. Ashiqur Rahman led by magistrate Abdul Wahed raided the institution following reports of alleged irregularities.

The joint forces also filed a case against Dr. Rafiqul Islam Anu for using false designation and certificate of a child specialist though he is a village doctor.

In another drive the law enforcers realised Tk 5,000 from Dr. M R Hasan for similar offence.

2 Sylhet BCL leaders jailed in arms case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A court here yesterday sentenced a Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader to life term rigorous imprisonment (RI) in absentia and awarded another party leader to 10 years imprisonment in an arms case.

The convicts are district BCL vice president Kibria Chowdhury Shamim alias Sumon who is still absconding and former district organising secretary of the party Bidhan Kumar Shaha who is now in jail.

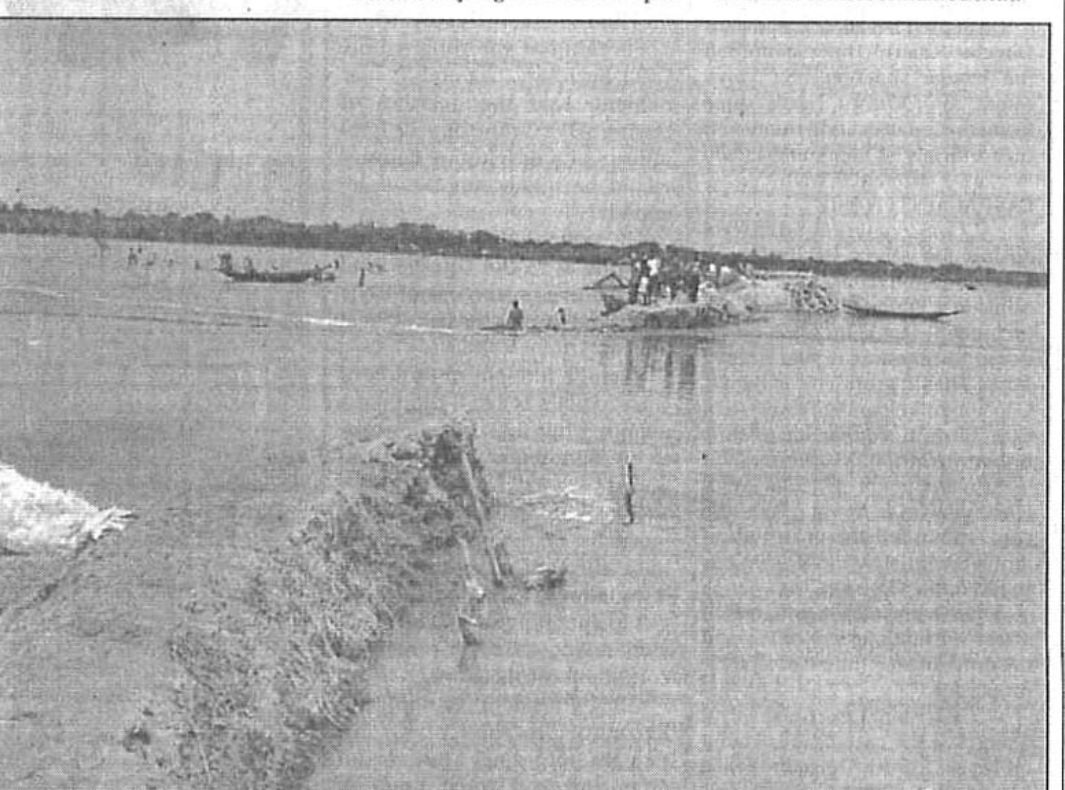
Additional District and Sessions Judge here Ferdous Ahmed pronounced the judgment in a crowded courtroom.

Sumon was fined Tk 1 lakh, in default, to suffer five years more imprisonment. The other convict, Bidhan was also fined Tk 10,000, in default, to suffer one year more RI.

Earlier, Bidhan was arrested from Uttar Bagbari area here on July 7. According to his confessional statement, the law enforcers recovered a SBBL gun and other arms from his close aide Sumon's Chouhatta house here.

However, Sumon managed to escape and remained absconding since the incident. Later, police submitted charge sheet against the two.

Advertisement for 'মেঘনা পেট্রোলিয়াম লিমিটেড' (Meghna Petroleum Limited). It includes details about a tender for fuel supply, contact information, and a deadline of 10/10/07. The text is in Bengali.



Water streaming through the breached embankment at Harishkhali point on river Kholpetua in Assassuni upazila in Satkhira. The photo was taken yesterday.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Bank, Engineering Department, Motijheel Office, Dhaka. It is an 'Invitation for Tender' for a project involving painting and repair work. It lists tender details, dates, and contact information. The text is in Bengali.