

Aila toll leaps to 121

Economic loss understood to be huge; thousands still marooned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The death toll from Cyclone Aila rose to 121 yesterday, as thousands of people marooned in the coastal areas were battling to survive the aftermath with little food and drinking water.

The storm that ripped through the southwestern coast Monday has left at least 32 people killed in Satkhira, 25 in Noakhali, 20 in Khulna, 13 in Bhola, nine in Barisal, seven in Patuakhali, six in Laxmipur, two each in Bagerhat, Chapainawabganj and Cox's Bazar, and one each in Magura, Natore and Lalmonirhat, said sources from the affected districts.

The food and disaster management ministry however puts the death count at 91.

According to reports from our correspondents, tidal waves churned by strong winds have inundated vast swathes of land.

Heavy rains coupled with gales flattened huge tracts of standing crops and washed away numerous fisheries.

They also caused extensive damage to embankments and levees in the coastal districts.

The HSC and equivalent examinations scheduled for the next two days have been postponed in nine upazilas - Ashashuni and

Shamnagar of Satkhira, Koira, Paikgacha, Botiaghata, Dumuria and Dakop of Khulna, and Mongla and Rampal of Bagerhat district.

Jessore Board Controller Amirul Islam told The Daily Star that dates for these examinations would be declared later.

Food Minister Abdur Razzak yesterday visited different cyclone-hit areas. He distributed relief among the locals at Panpatti village under Galachipa upazila in Patuakhali district.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: In Barisal division, Bhola appears to have borne the worst of the cyclone.

Road and water communications between seven upazilas in the district have been snapped for two days now.

Local sources said Aila has destroyed thousands of hectares of crops including Aus, Aman and Boro rice, and vegetables.

Manpura flood control embankment has been breached at many points. Strong current has carried away a 10-km stretch of the dam, and onrushing tide levelled hundreds of homes.

People in the remote flood-affected areas were suffering from an acute shortage of drinking water.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna reports: At 5:00pm yesterday,



Residents in this fishermen's neighbourhood in Bandartila of Chittagong continue to endure the wrath of Cyclone Aila as an unusually high tide inundated their village yesterday.

PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

the death count in the cyclonic storm stood at 22, according to official sources.

Of the dead, 20 were in Khulna district and the other two, women, in Bagerhat district.

The storm and tidal surge have destroyed almost 80 percent of the forest camps in Chandpai and Sharankhola ranges, said Mihir

Kumar, divisional forest officer in charge of the Sundarbans east wing.

According to Khulna district control room, Aila has left around 30,000 houses in ruins. The number could be even higher once a damage full assessment is done.

Unofficial sources said over three lakh people in Khulna and Bagerhat districts have remained marooned as

of filing this report at 7:00pm.

At least 90 percent of shrimp enclosures and flood control dams in Khulna and Bagerhat districts have been washed away.

Cargo handling at Mongla Port, which was suspended on Sunday night, resumed yesterday morning.

Our correspondent from Satkhira

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SSC pass rate falls by 3pc

Number of GPA-5 achievers goes up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

This year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination results show an over three-percent drop in the pass rate from last year but a jump in the number of students obtaining GPA-5.

This year 67.41 percent students passed while last year the figure was 70.81 percent.

A total of 45,934 students of eight education boards received the highest score of GPA-5 (Grade Point Average) this year. Last year 41,917 students got the highest score.

The number of schools with cent percent pupils passed has also increased to 2,726 from last year's 2,272.

The results were published yesterday, within two months of the exams.

Viqarunnisa Noon School and College of Dhaka once again became the top school in the country.

The average pass percentage of SSC, SSC (vocational) and Dakhil examinations, held under 10 education boards, including the Technical Education Board and Madrasa Board, also decreased by 1.29 percent as the total pass rate dropped to 70.89 percent from last year's 72.18 percent.

Some 3,08,136 examinees failed this year.

The results show a significant, 15.73 percent, rise of GPA-5 scorers with 62,307 students achieving the distinction--an increase of 9,807 from last year's 52,500.

This grading system was introduced in 2001 when only 76 examinees secured GPA-5.

The number of schools with zero pupils passed came down to 72 from last year's 91. This year the number of examinees expelled also continued to drop. Only 541 students were expelled against last year's 707.

As many as 10,58,674 students--5,56,839 boys and 5,01,835 girls--sat for this year's SSC and equivalent examinations and 7,50,538 of them passed. Pass percentage of boys and girls is 73.13 and 68.41 respectively.

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Grabbing easy, freeing tough

Rally for rivers

River-gobblers having a feast on Buriganga, Shitalakhya, Balu as they face no govt resistance

PINAKI ROY

The Buriganga Second Bridge in Postogola overlooks a significant part of the river. Anybody standing on the bridge would have a clear view of the river and easily realise how shamelessly and ruthlessly encroachers have squeezed the lifeline of the capital.

Encroachment on the Buriganga over the years was so severe that the Shyampur side of the bridge has become just like a bottleneck.

A river view project of Bashundhara has filled up a part of the river and its shore on the Keraniganj side. On the other side beside the Navy jetty, a five-storey building is standing in a place, which was part of the Buriganga just five years ago.

A lush green lawn and a well-planned pond increase the beauty of the building, which in fact choked the river here.

It all happened in the past and no-one cared. But even now an encroacher is demarcating the river erecting bamboo poles in the waters without any intervention by the government agencies.

Local people say someone from Hazaribagh is developing his housing estate called 'Hudu' housing encroaching on the river. The owner of the housing company was not available for comments.

Encroachment on the Buriganga by different vested quarters was so extensive that they even built markets and other structures after filling up the river.

The government took some initiatives to remove the illegal structures, but the moves never yielded any tangible result.

"It's hard for us to take action against many encroachers as we don't have magistracy power and the grabbers manage the law enforcers," says a BIWTA official asking not to be identified.

Not only the Buriganga, industrialists and local influential people are encroaching on the Shitalakhya river indiscriminately as the administration is apparently doing nothing at all.

Just under the Kanchpur Bridge, sand traders and stone crushing companies are doing business occupying the river banks, while industries have encroached on the other side.

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Sand traders erect a fence and fill up a section of the Shitalakhya to stock sand. The photo was taken near the Kanchpur Bridge.

PHOTO: SHAFIQU ALAM

One does not have to be an expert to identify river encroachments. It's just too obvious. But it's all the more difficult to prove as all the river-gobblers have ownership papers, thanks to our corrupt land administration and lax monitoring by river regulatory body. Powerful, rich and ruthless, these river-gobblers find no difficulty in maneuvering legal system and managing law enforcement. They have become seemingly invincible. But should we let them get away with it? Lend your hands and together we can win a war.

... The Daily Star

2 more BDR men die in Dhaka, Feni

Govt probe report to be disclosed today, says Sohel Taj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) jawan was found hanging from a ceiling fan at the Shaik Lines in Feni's 19th Rifles Battalion and a BDR Imam died of liver cirrhosis at a Dhaka hospital yesterday, taking the BDR death toll following the mutiny to 24.

A Sylhet court yesterday said it will frame charges against 108 arrested BDR Jawans on June 9 and 10 for two separate sedition cases in connection with the February 25 BDR mutiny.

These would be the first charges framed against suspected BDR mutineers. Forty sedition cases were filed in 29 districts against BDR jawans in different units around the country.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj told The Daily Star yesterday that the government probe report on the BDR mutiny will come out today.

"We will publish the report at 4:00pm tomorrow through media," Taj said.

2 MORE DEATHS
Yesterday, the BDR issued a press release saying that initial assessments suggested havilder assistant Zakir Hossain Bhuiyan of the 19th Battalion in Feni "committed suicide" as he was found hanging from a ceiling fan at the Shaik Lines around 7:45am.

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Road projects may need 339 years to finish

Says BIDS study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The projects in the road sector for the present fiscal year would take 10 to 339 years to complete if the current rate of implementation persists, says a study of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

"A large number of road projects are often taken up on political considerations resulting in very thin distribution of resources for many road projects as well as consequent slow rate of project implementation," said the report titled 'Size and Quality of Annual Development Programme' prepared by BIDS Research Director Zaid Bakht.

The report's findings were the outcome of an analysis of the budgetary allocation in

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Local govt gets top ADP priority

Tk 30,500cr scheme approved; govt focuses project implementation

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The size of the annual development programme (ADP) in the budget for next fiscal year (FY-10) has been set at Tk 30,500 crore, which is 33 percent higher than that of the revised ADP for the current FY.

In the next ADP, additional allocation has been made for removal of regional disparity and development of women, children and those who do not have any assets.

Though power is the top priority sector, the Power Division has got the second highest allocation in the next ADP, and that is only 11 per cent higher than the allocation for power sector in the revised ADP for this year.

But the Local Government Division has got the highest allocation in the next ADP, which is 38 percent higher than that in the current FY. The National Economic Council (NEC) at a

meeting yesterday with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair approved the new ADP.

Talking to journalists later, Planning Minister AK Khandker said, "We will ask ministries to start implementing the next ADP at the beginning (of FY) so that it is completed in time. We will try to ensure timely release of project funds."

Asked about the allocation for power sector in the next FY, he said it is similar to that of this year. He however said block allocations have been made for different sectors. It is seen that power sector can utilise more funds, it will get that. Money will be no problem, he added.

The original ADP this year was of Tk 25,600 crore, and the revised ADP was of Tk 23,000 crore.

The Tk 30,500 crore next ADP will consist of Tk 16,365 crore foreign aid or 53.65 per cent,

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Beximco Textiles tops dubious list

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Beximco Textiles Ltd tops the list of private and public bank loan defaulters with Tk 366.35 crore of unpaid loans, according to Bangladesh Bank.

Padma Textiles Ltd, another concern of Beximco Ltd, was second on the list with Tk 303.69 crore in defaulted loans.

Banking sources said the two firms have now merged and taken the name Bextex Ltd. However, they are listed individually with banks.

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50

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