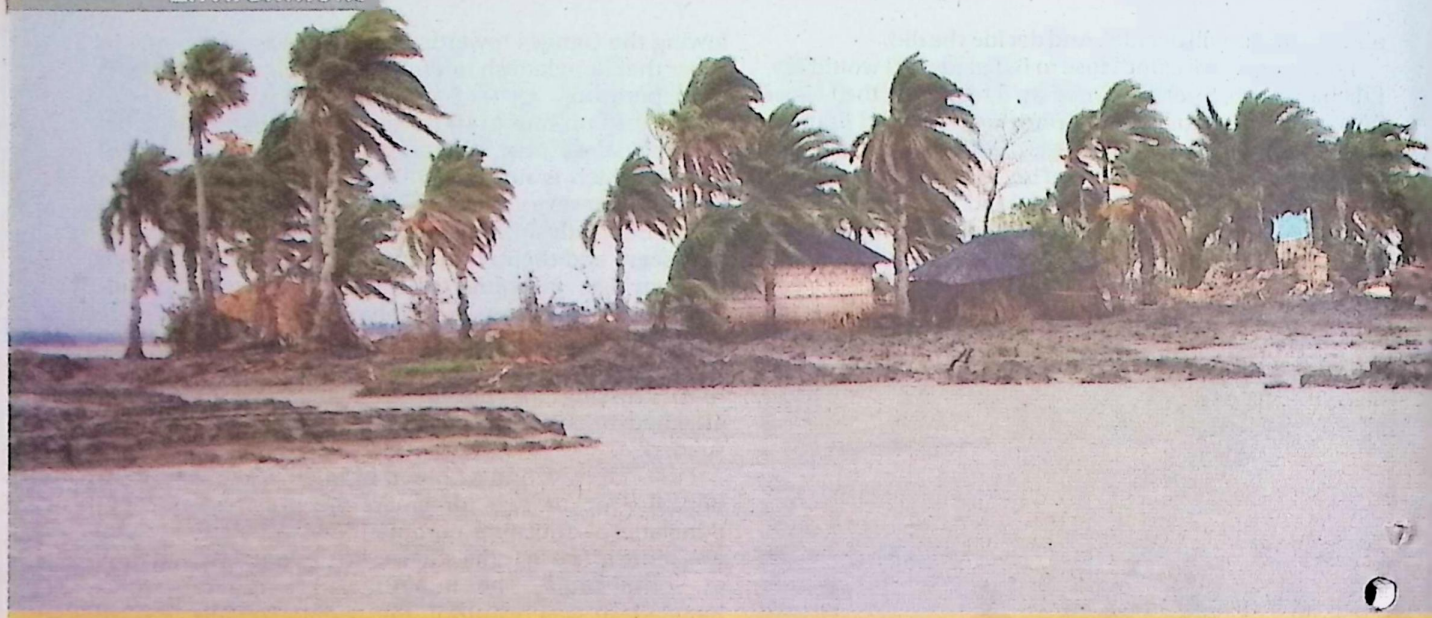


What they aren't Telling us about Cyclone Aila

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We can't even find dry place to bury the dead, this is worse than Sidr: a resident of Nolia village remarked. Nolia village is located at the interior of the Khulna delta, in the Sutarkhali union of Dacope upazila, and is among the regions worst affected by Cyclone Aila. *We have never seen so much water before, not even in '88,* stranded residents of Nolia village informed us. Making our way into the interiors of the south-western coastal delta of Khulna, much of which now lies inundated in salt water, with plants, fish and vegetation rotting in it, we came across many small villages like Nolia. The sight of dry land and fresh water was an anomaly in our journey.

On May 25, Cyclone Aila swept across the south-western coastal belt of Bangladesh, packing winds of upto 90 kmph, propelling tidal waves 13 ft high, and damaging over 1700 km of river embankments, washing away the lives and livelihoods of people in different places. Khulna is among the worst-affected districts, followed very closely by Satkhira.

The scale of the damage caused by Aila is much larger than the damage caused by Cyclone Sidr. In some places, particularly in Khulna where I was in the week following Aila, people have been living in make-shift houses on any available highland because the flood had washed away everything but the clothes on their back. Cyclone Sidr had damaged homes, crops, and livestock overnight. But Aila, with its stagnant, saline flood waters, is like a slow poison that is steadily, but surely, killing vegetation, fish and fruits, destroying arable land, and leaving behind a trail of homeless, internally displaced people whose homes have either been water-logged, completely inundated, or destroyed by the flood and livelihoods-- their assets and occupations-- have been destroyed. According to official figures, over 200,000 people have been displaced, the actual numbers might be higher.

In Dacope, whole villages have been lost to the flood. From the trawler that carried us to the interior of the delta, southwards towards Sutarkhali, all we could see was water. Sutarkhali was about five hours away from Khulna city. It seemed the rivers had devoured everything that had stood in their paths. Of the four severely-affected unions of Dacope, almost 90% of Sutarkhali and Komorkhola, and, 40% of Banishanta, and 25% of Tiladanga remain inundated in flood water varying in depths of between 1 to 5 feet. It is feared that the upcoming full moon and the monsoon rains will make the situation worse by causing a further rise in water levels.