

# Aila victims brace for rains as dikes yet to be repaired

ABU AHMED, Satkhira

Thousands of Aila victims in the worst affected Shyamnagar and Assassuni upazilas fear added sufferings during the coming monsoon as major breaches on the damaged embankments have not been repaired even nine months after the cyclone ravaged the area.

Against the backdrop of the Water Development Board's (WDB) failure to repair the major breaches, the local administration with the help of army has started constructing a 'ring road' to protect a large area in Shyamnagar upazila on an emergency basis.

However, there is hardly any hope for completion of repair work of the major embankments before the rains as the contractors who got work order from the WDB failed to start the work in time.

Earlier Satkhira district administration with the help of army and locals made small repairs at 32 points on the embankments in worst-hit Gabura and Padmapukur unions in Shyamnagar upazila and in

Pratapnagar union in Assassuni upazila on an emergency basis.

"We did the repair work in exchange of 1500 tonnes of rice under the Food for Work programme and cash Tk 4,50,000. But the high pressure of water and strong current forced us to stay away from repairing the major breaches that later got widened with saline water gushing through them," Satkhira Deputy Commissioner (DC) Md Abdus Samad said.

The Aila affected people who are now residing in makeshift homes on the embankments fear that their sufferings will increase manifold during the next monsoon.

Over 12,000 residents of Gabura and Padmapukur unions in Shyamnagar upazila have left their ancestral houses for other areas in the country in search of work and safety.

Earlier on several occasions, ministers and high officials including those from WDB assured of taking measures to repair the major breaches on the damaged embankments in the lean period from December last year to January this year.

The WDB authorities took up projects to repair the major breaches on the embankments at a cost of Tk 13,74,00,000 and invited tender to repair the nine major breaches on the embankments in the worst affected Gabura and Padmapukur unions.

They issued work order to nine contractors for doing the job on December 24 last year but no progress has been made to repair the breached embankments.

"The local administration repaired breaches at 24 points with the help of army and local people. But repair of larger cracks at five points -- 9 No Sora, Chakbara, Jeliakhali, Khalishabunia and Chadnimukho in this union has not been done due to negligence of the authorities concerned. Over 8,000 out of 37,000 affected people of my union have left their homes in search of work and also for safe living as the authorities failed to repair the major breaches in time," Shafiqul Azam Lenin, chairman of Gabura union said.

Amzadul Islam, chairman of Padmaukur union, another worst hit area said, "The affected people are

facing uncertainty in the coming monsoon as four larger breaches at Jhhapa, Chandipur, Chaulkhola and Garkompur in the union could not be repaired. Over 4000 out of 35000 residents left the union for safety and in search of work. Acute scarcity of safe drinking water adds to the sorrow of Aila affected people."

"Cyclone Aila destroyed our houses, furniture and livestock. We will have to borrow added sufferings if the embankments are not repaired shortly," said Mohammad Ali Mallik of village Jhhapa in Gabura union.

Contacted, local WDB Executive Engineer Mujibar Rahman said they will be able to repair the major breaches within April next as the department issued work order to repair the breaches.

Satkhira DC Md Abdus Samad, who visited the affected area recently, told this correspondent that the WDB may not be able to complete repairing the breaches before the next monsoon as the contractors concerned did not start their work in time.



PHOTO: STAR  
Jamaat men led by local activist Ibrahim set fire to the house of freedom fighter Nazmul Haque at Kashidanga village in Baliadangi upazila of Thakurgaon district in a bid to grab the land on Monday afternoon. They also injured Nazmul, his wife and son.

## Jamaat men beat up FF, set house afire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Jamaat men beat up a freedom fighter, his wife and son and set his house afire following an altercation over ownership of a land at Kashidanga village under Baliadangi upazila of Thakurgaon district Monday afternoon.

Seriously injured freedom fighter Nazmul Haque, 58, was first admitted to Baliadangi Upazila Health complex and then shifted to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

Police and local people said landless Nazmul applied for a piece of land in 1982 and got a 45-decimal land from the government at Kashidanga village. He has been living in a house built on eight decimals of the allotted land and cultivating vegetables on the rest area.

Local Jamaat activist Ibrahim came to Nazmul's house Sunday afternoon and claimed the ownership of five decimals of the land. As Nazmul requested Ibrahim to bring a surveyor, he left the place.

At around 5:00pm on Monday, 50 to 60 Jamaat men led by Ibrahim and his son Ashraful came to Nazmul

house to take possession of the land.

At one stage of altercation between Ibrahim and Nazmul, Ashraful and other Jamaat men swooped on Nazmul, his wife Farida Begum, 42, and son Moshir Rahman, 18, leaving them injured. They also set fire to the house.

When the fire fighters from Baliadangi reached the spot, Ibrahim's men obstructed them. Police rushed to the spot, dispersed the Jamaat supporters and helped the fire

fighters extinguish the blaze.

District Muktiyoddha Sangsad Convenor Jitandranath Roy demanded immediate arrest of and exemplary punishment to the Jamaat activists who beat up freedom fighter Nazmul and his family members and set his house afire.

Asked about the attack on freedom fighter Nazmul and his family members by Jamaat men, Police Superintendent BM Harun-ur-Rashid said law enforcers have visited the spot and are looking for the attackers.



PHOTO: STAR  
Seriously injured freedom fighter Nazmul Haque undergoing treatment at Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.



PHOTO: STAR  
Left without any repair since cyclone Aila hit the area on May 25 last year, this breached portion of embankment at Garkompur on Kobadak River in Padmapukur union of Shyamnagar upazila under Satkhira district leaves locals vulnerable to added sufferings during the coming monsoon. A few other large breaches including those at Jhhapa in the same union and Chakbara on the Kholetua River in Gabura union of Shyamnagar upazila are also in the same condition.

## BIG AREA OF SUNDARBANS GUTTED Fire from cigarette butt or a sabotage by illegal loggers?

MORSHED ALI KHAN from Gulishakhali, Sunderbans

Smouldering ashes, billowing smoke and smell of charred plants and trees marked about three square kilometre area of Chandpai Range in the Sunderbans when this correspondent visited the area on Monday morning.

Twelve hours earlier, villagers, fire fighters and forest officials doused the 'mysterious' fire that ravaged the forest area on Saturday night and Sunday.

All along the five kilometres deep into the forest where the fire started on Saturday night, hundreds of neatly chopped stems of sundari, baine and other trees bore the testimony to rampant illegal logging in the world's largest mangrove forest, also listed as a World Heritage Site by the Unesco.

Surprisingly, the mangrove forest in this part of the Sunderbans is covered with low and thick bushes instead of large trees.

To secure the forest area of Amurbunia, more fire fighters from Morelganj yesterday walked over five kilometres into the forest area with heavy pump machines and hoses.

Forest officials said they will keep a round-the-clock vigil in the area for at least seven more days.

While some forest officials said careless discarding of burning cigarette butts by 'licensed fishermen' caused the fire, local people and over a dozen forest men referred to 'sabotage' by illegal loggers.

Villagers living along a high embankment near the forest spotted smoke on Saturday night and alerted Gulishakhali Forest Petrol office over mobile phone at around 1:30pm.

"As soon as we heard the news we informed high officials and requested Morelganj fire service for immediate action," Mohammad Shahabuddin, Range Officer of Chadpai, said.

"We could not enter the forest on Saturday night due to lack of transport. On Sunday morning fire fighters were able to enter the forest and bring the situation under control after several hours," said Mohammad Kaiyum Khan, leader of a nine-man team of the fire brigade.

During the last six years nine forest fires destroyed flora and fauna on hundreds

of acres of land in the Sunderbans.

The five kilometres of forest area that this correspondent covered on foot along with firemen did not at all represent the mangrove forest with its diversified plants and trees. Instead, there are only a few feet high thick bushes with creepers enveloping them.

Logging in the area is so rampant that villagers openly talk about it in presence forest officials.

On Friday, a day before the fire raged, forest officials walked into an area where logging is prohibited. Sensing their presence, some 20

labourers who were busy chopping down trees, fled into the deep forest leaving a good number of logs.

Angered by the 'unusual' intervention, loggers, who have long been plundering the forest resources without any 'disturbance', might have done the act of sabotage, said a forest official requesting anonymity.

"We heard that these people, known to everyone in the area, were planning to set the forest area on fire following several incidents with the forest offices during the last one week," said Mosharrar Sardar, a villager.



PHOTO: STAR  
Ashes and charred remains of plants and trees at Chandpai range in the Sunderbans after a 'mysterious' fire destroyed vegetation in a three square kilometre area there.

## Shop employees in Sylhet put up roadblock

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Employees of over 250 shops of a mall in Sylhet city yesterday put up a barricade on the main road in Zindabazar area to press for release of two of their fellows who along with three shop owners were arrested on Monday night.

The barricade was removed at around 1:00pm after local political leaders assured the agitating shop employees of arranging bail for the two.

Shop owners and employees of Al-Hamra Shopping City clashed with police on Monday night, leaving at least 15 people, including three policemen, injured. After the incident, police arrested three shop owners and two employees at the mall.

Though the shop owners were released at midnight, the employees--Sayedur Rahman and Shabbir--remained in the custody as of filing of this report at 7:00pm yesterday.

Witnesses and police said the trouble began at around 8:00pm when a customer and the employees of a cosmetics store at the shopping mall exchanged heated words over price of an item. At one stage, the customer went out of the mall and returned after a few minutes with some police personnel who settled the matter.

But the man again came to the mall with police personnel allegedly members of a patrol party at around 8:30pm. Seeing two people with knives in hands with the policemen, the shop owners and employees became agitated and swooped on the two. They also beat up havilder Quamruzzaman, constables Shamsu and Siddique.

During the incident, the shop owners and employees hurled brickbats at the police, prompting them to resort to baton charge on the shopkeepers and employees. At least 12 people, including shopkeeper Ali Masud, were injured in police action. Police also fired two blank shots to bring the situation under control.

Traffic on the main road in front of the shopping mall remain suspended for an hour from 8:15pm.

## Verdict in Satkhira BDR mutiny case Apr 19

Trial of Sunamganj case starts Apr 2

STAR NATIONAL DESK

The verdict in BDR mutiny case at Nildumur in Satkhira will be pronounced on April 19 while the trial of mutineers of Sunamganj, Sylhet will start on April 2.

Our correspondent in Satkhira reports: The Special Court No-1 set up at 41 Rifles Battalion in the district yesterday fixed April 19 for pronouncement of verdict in the BDR mutiny case at Nildumur in Shyamnagar upazila.

The three-member court headed by BDR Director General Major General (DG) M Mainul Islam heard the arguments that ended yesterday.

All the 60 accused BDR mutineers were in the dock during the arguments.

Earlier the court received the statements of 27 prosecution witnesses in the case.

Forty-four out of 60 accused BDR mutineers submitted written statements to the court pleading not guilty while 16 others confessed to their involvement in mutiny and begged for mercy in writing before the court on January 20.

While arguing, BDR prosecutor Lt. Col. Badrul Alam in his submission told the court that the 60 mutineers supported the incidents at Pilkhana Headquarters and were ready to

revolt. They also misbehaved with the officers and their family members. They threatened the BDR officials and took arms and ammunition from the armory without permission, he added.

Calling other soldiers to join the revolt, the mutineers also brought out procession and chanted slogans supporting the Pilkhana incidents, he said.

He said the depositions of all 27 witnesses corroborated each other and proved allegations against the accused beyond any doubt.

Forty-four accused BDR mutineers however in their submission before the court pleaded not guilty.

Our Staff Correspondent in Sylhet reports: Trial of the BDR mutineers of Sunamganj battalion will start April 2 and run till the next day.

BDR DG Major General Mainul Islam will head the tribunal.

A court has already been set up at the Sylhet sector headquarters in Akhulia on Sylhet Sunamganj road.

Twenty members of the 8 Rifles Battalion will be brought from Sunamganj district jail and produced before the court.

## Arrested schoolgirl top outlaw, claim police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Kushtia police on Monday arrested a teenage schoolgirl from Piyatala area in the town claiming that she is a 'top cadre' of outlawed Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF).

Arrestee Ananya Islam, 13, is a student of class nine at Housing Girls High School.

Her father Nurul Islam Bachchu, a businessman, was killed by criminals ten years ago.

Police said they arrested Ananya from a house at Piyatala at about 8:30 pm on Monday. They arrested the girl

after a GD (general diary) was filed against her with Sadar police station on Sunday, according to police.

The GD was filed by her four uncles and two cousins. Police said the girl was involved with the outfit for the last two and half years.

"She was under watch and we arrested her after becoming sure that she belongs to the outfit," said Chokidar Abdul Halim, Assistant Police Superintendent (ASP) of Kushtia Sadar.

In the GD, the girl's uncles and cousins alleged that Ananya was accusing them of killing her father Bachchu

who was murdered on March 12, 2000 and threatening to kill them with the help of GMF cadres.

Sources said, Bachchu, a wood trader was killed by a gang of his locality over past enmity.

After the killing, Bachchu's brothers filed several cases against a number of people including some Awami League (AL) activists of the area.

A court sentenced four people including two Chhatra League activists to life term imprisonment in the case in 2004. They are in jail now.