



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

A rescue team searches for bodies under mud and rubble after a wall along with a huge chunk of earth fell on shanties at the feet of Batali Hill yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

Search for the loved ones

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Chittagong

"I heard a big bang during the thundering rains early in the morning while I was in bed with my wife and son in our shanty and then all hell broke loose."

This was the way Amir Hossain alias Kanu, a dweller of a slum under Batali Hill near Tiger Pass intersection in Chittagong, described the landslide there yesterday which left 15 people dead.

Kanu rushed out of the shanty with his wife and son, only to find his neighbouring shanties smashed under a huge pile of mud and a 70-foot long retaining wall of the hill.

"I saw my sister-in-law next door trapped in waist-deep mud," said Kanu, who told his family members to take shelter and went on to rescue her.

"We heard Tanjina, the two-year-old daughter of my neighbour Bachchu Mia, crying inside the mud," said Kanu. But they were not able to dig her out on time to save her.

Bachchu, a vendor, who lost his first wife and four children in the accident, sat struck and speechless while journalists tried to get the names of the victims from him. He was saved as he spent the night with his second wife in a nearby area.

His elder daughter Sharmin, who got married only around 15 days ago, had come on a visit only the previous day, only to meet her tragic death.

"We were so happy when Sharmin came. But it would have been better if she had not come as she would be alive right now," said the grieving father.

The wailing of the surviving neighbours suddenly rose around 1:25pm when the dead bodies of rickshaw-puller Amjad Hossain, another dweller; his wife Rajia and their daughter Sharmin, all hailing from Rangpur, were dug out.

Jarina Begum, a middle aged woman, sat waiting at the site since morning for news of her sister Minu and three other family members.

Their bodies were recovered around 5:30pm.

In the midst of the debris, two women, Nurjahan and her elderly mother of Kadamtali area, ran from one end to another on hearing cries of rescuers at the slightest sighting, either of a belonging or a body.

She searches for her sister Hosne Ara, her nephew Sajjad and niece Shaheda, not leaving the spot even for a moment the whole day.

Their search came to an end around 7:00pm when rescuers were able to see the three bodies stuck deep inside the mud. They are still to be dug out.

Meanwhile, Chittagong District Administration at an emergency meeting for disaster management in the evening yesterday decided to provide Tk 20,000 to the affected families as compensation and Tk 5,000 to each victim for treatment expenses.

The meeting organised by the administration at circuit house in Chittagong also decided to re-establish electricity supply in the area within 24 hours and to keep all schools open in waterlogged areas for people to take shelter.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Chittagong Faiz Ahmed, Additional Divisional Commissioner (revenue) of Chittagong division Nurul Islam and representatives of police, the city corporation, fire service and Public Works Department were present.

The meeting also decided to notify the government organisations owning the hills to evict illegal structures there, rehabilitate the evicted people in khas lands in their respective upazilas and to provide the Chittagong Metropolitan Police commissioner with the list of hill owning organisations for eviction drives.

The meeting also decided to form a committee led by the additional deputy commissioner (General) with representatives of different government organisations present at the meeting to probe into the accident.

UNDP suggests stronger EC

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UNDP has recommended strengthening the Election Commission further, saying it still requires resources and systems as well as the capacity to enforce electoral laws and rules strictly.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) made a 5-point recommendation for Bangladesh in a new study report released from its Asia-Pacific Regional Centre in Bangkok on Wednesday.

All political parties should refrain from personal attacks on one another and from delivering provocative speeches. They should follow the electoral code of conduct and the representation of the people order, suggested the document.

According to the report, the EC still requires resources and systems in place to verify or investigate the expenditure filings of candidates. The commission should develop a mechanism to monitor the electoral expenditure of the candidates and parties and take due legal action in case of any violation.

The electoral body should set examples by disqualifying candidates, if applicable, for violating electoral norms and rules, insisted the study.

A 25-page investigation on the electoral processes in seven countries of South and South East Asia styled "Understanding Electoral Violence in Asia" studied electioneering in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand. It made policy, legislative and institutional-level recommendations to reduce the risk of electoral violence.

S Asian women rights leaders meet today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading South Asian women rights activists, academics, and professionals are meeting in Dhaka today for a two-day conference to discuss various issues of concern of the women in the region.

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs, Dr Shirin Sharmin Showdhury, will inaugurate the programme at 10:00am at Biam auditorium in the city, said a press statement of Manusher Jonno Foundation yesterday.

South Asia Foundation, Manusher Jonno Foundation, and Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi are jointly organising the third conference of the South Asia Women's Network (SWAN) on "Women of South Asia and the Green Economy".

Dr Vandana Shiva, director, Navdanya and director, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, India, will present the keynote paper at the conference to be attended by over 75 women leaders, activists, academicians and professionals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The conference will also consist of five different plenary sessions where experts will present papers on "the Traditional Arts as Inspiration for Contemporary Indian Art", "Gender and Development Issues in Myanmar", "Seed as Empowerment of Women" and "Women and Education: Findings from a Research Study".

Papers on "South Asia Women's Peace Charter", "Young Women Artists of South Asia: A Unique Experiment",

Micro Credit and Changes in Women's life "Women and Sufism", "Education for Empowerment" "Using technology for Micro Enterprise Growth" "Women and religion in South Asia", "Rediscovering Indigenous Sources in South Asia" will also be presented.

The conference is expected to prepare a draft declaration. Former secretary general of Amnesty International, Irene Khan, will address the concluding session at 3:00pm on July 3.

SWAN is headquartered in Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi. Prof Veena Sikri is the convener of SWAN which emerged in March 2009.

With the network, South Asian women share experiences, learn from each other, identify best practices, and work towards issue-based collaboration across the region through agreed plans of action.

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