PHOTOS: RASHED SUMON



The trail of destruction of 1991 cyclone still haunted them.

"Twenty-two years have passed but I cannot not forget the scenes of hundreds of floating bodies of men, women and livestock in the seashore and rivers," said sexagenarian Hemayet Hawlader, sitting at his shop at Khajortola on the embankment.

He said people could not save themselves as strong wind and tidal surge washed them away. "I saved myself by grabbing a tree," recalled Hemayet as he looked at the rough sea.

About 1.38 lakh people lost their lives as the cyclone with a speed of 225-kilometre per hour accompanied by a 35-feet high tidal surge battered 257 unions in 20 upazilas of 15 different coastal districts at midnight on April 29, 1991, according to official statistics.

Many families were completely obliterated; others had only one or two surviving members. Sixty-five-year-old Anisur Rahman was one of those who lost every member of his family. "I had to start a new life after the cyclone," he told The Daily Star standing amid a crowd on the embankment on and around of which about 3,000 people live.

As evening approached the crowd on the 21 kilometer embankment was growing fast. People who had taken shelter in the cyclone centres returned home. Curious people far from the city and nearby places also gathered to see the weather —stormy wind and huge tidal waves slashing the embankment.

Mahasen crossed the area almost without any major impact on the life and properties of the people in Chittagong and Cox's' Bazaar, both of which were supposed to have been the prime targets of the cyclone. It frequently changed directions, lost strength and crossed Bangladesh touching Patuakhali, Barguna, Bhola districts, leaving 17 people dead and damaging crops, trees and houses.

Compared to the destruction left by super cyclones SIDR and Aila that hit Bangladesh's coastline in 2007 and 2009, Mahasen had merely given a scare to the people.

Meanwhile, the mood of the crowd on the embankment had drastically changed. They were now actually enjoying the cool weather; some were seen taking photographs of each other. There was no sign of fear in their faces at all. "I was frightened since last night but now I thank the Almighty for sparing us," said a young man of the area, Munir smiling widely.

Before night fall, all was calm at the embankment and in Chittagong. This time around at least, the worst was over.