

Cyclone shelters in shabby state

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

May 15. The sea was rough and there was tension in the air. The district Met office had warned that cyclone Mahasen was about to hit the coast. The local administration asked the people in the coastal areas to take cover in safe shelters.

Hundreds of people of Chalitabunia village in Rangabali upazila, an island nearly 60 kilometres off Patuakhali district, started rushing towards a shelter. But they were afraid to step in there because of the cracks in many parts of the structure, including the entrance walls.

The villagers then rushed to relatives' houses in that village and the ones nearby.

Rangabali has three shelters that can accommodate up to 4,000 people. But it is inhabited by around 27,000 people and requires at least five more shelters, said Rangabali Union Parishad Chairman Fazlur Rahman last month.

Shanti Ranjan Baiddhya, district relief and

rehabilitation officer, told The Daily Star that the eight upazilas in Patuakhali have 322 cyclone shelters, 24 of which have long been in a state of dilapidation and are thereby useless.

The situation in Rangabali is similar to those in most of the coastal districts, where sandbank areas take the full brunt of natural calamities, being the first to be hit by cyclones, floods or tidal currents.

Relief and rehabilitation officials in Patuakhali, Barguna and Bhola said there are 1,297 cyclone shelters in the districts that can put up a maximum of 20 lakh people, whereas there are 47 lakh inhabitants.

Most of the people who do not own brick houses remain particularly vulnerable to cyclones, which strike the country quite regularly.

The three districts have around 500 populated sandbanks that lack adequate shelters and are even more exposed to natural disasters. Many of the existing shelters are highly unsafe, the officials said.



A cyclone shelter in Galachipa upazila of Patuakhali, which has become unusable for a lack of maintenance.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

EU asks

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allegations of US authorities spying on EU offices. If the allegations prove to be true, it would be an extremely serious matter which will have a severe impact on EU-US relations.

"On behalf of the European parliament, I demand full clarification and require further information speedily from the US authorities with regard to these allegations."

Luxembourg's foreign minister, Jean Asselborn, told Der Spiegel: "If these reports are true, it's disgusting. The United States would be better off monitoring its secret services rather than its allies. We must get a guarantee from the very highest level now that this stops immediately."

Snowden's disclosures in the Guardian about US surveillance programmes have ignited a political furore in the US and abroad over the balance between privacy rights and national security.

According to Der Spiegel, the NSA also targeted telecommunications at the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, home to the European council, the collective of EU national governments.

Without citing sources, the magazine reported that more than five years ago security officers at the EU had noticed several missed calls and traced them to NSA offices within the Nato compound in Brussels. Each EU member state has rooms in Justus Lipsius with phone and internet connections, which ministers can use.

Snowden, a US citizen, went to Hong Kong in May, weeks before the publication in the Guardian of details he provided about secret government surveillance of internet and phone traffic. He has been in a Moscow airport transit area since last weekend. The government of Ecuador is reviewing his request for asylum.

1.33 lakh girl

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programme at her office in the capital.

"Educated youths will be the actual force to free the nation from poverty," Hasina said.

"We don't want to hear any more that a student has stopped her education because of her guardian's inability to pay tuition fees or buy books," she added.

The government has allocated Tk 1,000 crore for the establishment of the trust fund this year to help female students.

A student will get a total of Tk 4,900 a year, which will include Tk 200 as monthly stipend, Tk 1,000 as examination fee and Tk 1,500 for buying books, official said.

Expressing her great pleasure at the programme, the premier said, "I have long dreamt of such a mechanism to help students pursue their studies."

She said her government had taken up a project to make all districts illiteracy-free during its previous tenure. But the last BNP-led

government shelved the project.

"Now we want to put in place such a system which the next government cannot annul," she added.

Bangabandhu had made primary education and female education free up to class eight despite immense economic hardship after liberation, Hasina said.

She urged benevolent persons and education lovers to donate money to this fund, saying they would get a tax waiver for the donation.

The premier hoped that the successful implementation of this initiative would add a new chapter in women's empowerment.

"Our journey has started. More money will be deposited in the fund. With the support of the government and private entrepreneurs, we will be able to constitute a bigger fund in future," she added.

Planning Minister A K Khandker, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, among others, spoke on the occasion.

8th Wage Board

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secretary Martuza Ahmed told The Daily Star that all allowances including basic salaries and benefits of journalists, employees and workers in newspapers and news agencies would be increased by 70 percent.

Another high official of the ministry said the Eighth Wage Board might be effective from July, 2012, when dearness allowance was announced for journalists and employees.

The board has proposed five categories for newspapers based on their circulation and income, said information ministry sources.

The Seventh Wage Board categorised newspapers in three sections.

The government on June 18, 2012, constituted the Eighth Wage Board to suggest the enhanced wages and benefits for newsmen.

A joint secretary of the information ministry preferring anonymity said Information Minister Hasanul Haq might brief the press on the Eighth Wage Board today.

Hefajat divided

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candidate. It is our personal decision as to who we will work for," said Keramat Ali, vice-president of Tongi unit Hefajat-e Islam, who is electioneering for Ajmat.

He claimed Hefajat's Gazipur district unit joint secretary Yakub Ali, Tongi unit organising secretary Riadul Islam, Tongi joint secretary Tajul Islam Faruki and some other leaders and activists, among others, were working for Ajmat.

"Apart from our Hefajat identity, we have other professions with different designations. For example, I am imam of a mosque in Tongi and I am using this identity during the electioneering," he added.

District general secretary of Hefajat Fazlur Rahman, who is working for Mannan, said, "We cannot support any candidate under the banner of Hefajat-e Islam as per a district committee meeting. We are working as per our individual decision."

Despite their claim of not

using the Hefajat banner, many Hefajat men were seen chanting slogans of Hefajat-e Islam during campaigns in several areas.

Earlier on Thursday, Hefajat Gazipur district unit joint secretary Nasiruddin at a street rally said, "Following the direction of our central ameer Allama Shah Ahmad Shafi, we will help MA Mannan win the election."

Asked about using religion and different national issues in electioneering, Keramat said, "It is unfair to use national issues in the local government election."

But Fazlur Rahman, who is also a joint secretary general of Islami Oikya Jote central committee, said, "It is local government election in paper only, not in reality."

"You can see that many high-profile BNP and Awami League leaders are conducting campaigns on behalf of their supported candidates. So, it is expected that national issues will dominate this election," he added.

Govt sits on setting up food courts

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progress report on the moves taken to this end. The report was due by July 1, 2011.

Such inaction prompted the court to issue a contempt rule against the government last December.

This finally led to a government move, with the law ministry in March this year issuing a gazette notification saying the government had set up a Pure Food Court in each district and Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna metropolitan cities.

However, it did not translate into action.

Interestingly, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed told The Daily Star that he was not aware of the gazette notification.

State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam, however, said he was aware of the matter and said food courts would soon become operational.

Some officials from Dhaka, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Chittagong, Sylhet, Moulvibazar,

Habiganj and Sherpur said the chief judicial magistrates had received the copy of the law ministry's March 24 gazette notification.

But none has taken any step to set up the court, since there is no detailed guideline in the gazette nor is there any specific time limit for assigning a magistrate to run the court.

Law Secretary ASSM Zahirul Haque said his office had done its duty by issuing the gazette notification. The judicial magistrates of the districts and metropolitan cities will now assign a magistrate to run the courts.

On appointing food analysts, he said the government could appoint food analysts or inspectors to move cases relating to food adulteration. He, however, feared that "appointment business" might take place centering on the recruitment.

Replying to a query, the law secretary said his office was not responsible for running awareness campaigns on food courts and

their functions.

He added his office would soon send letters to the chief judicial magistrates, asking them to inform the ministry about their progress on the setting up of food courts.

Following reports by The Daily Star on severe food adulteration, the home ministry had formed some mobile courts in the mid-2000s to conduct drives against the menace. But all such drives fizzled out within days.

Only Dhaka City Corporation and Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI) have their inspection teams to take action against food adulteration. They also run mobile courts.

Manzill Murshid, a Supreme Court lawyer and president of HRPB, said a few mobile courts were working just in Dhaka. So the crime continues totally unabated elsewhere in the country.

"If the government sets up food courts in every district, those responsible

for adulterating food will be tried and punished duly and mobile courts will not be required in this regard," he said.

Mobile courts hand down lenient punishment to offenders, which is not enough to prevent food adulteration, he observed.

The food court, when set up, can fine anyone for food adulteration up to Tk 3 lakh and give three years' imprisonment under the 1959 ordinance.

Meanwhile, a law ministry official said the ministry would soon seek the opinion of the Supreme Court on empowering magistrates to run food courts. Upon the SC's consent, the ministry will issue a new gazette notification to this effect.

On August 16, 2010, the HC directed the police to file cases under the Special Powers Act 1974 against traders responsible for food adulteration and price spirals. The highest punishment for such offences is death. But no effective development has been observed in this regard as well.

Witness Jalal denies

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over an alleged assault on defence counsel Munshi Ahsan Kabir. The tribunal on May 28 issued the rule following Kabir's petition.

Citing Jalal's reply, his lawyer Mohammad Mohsen Rashid, who submitted the reply yesterday, told the tribunal that the "story" as mentioned in the defence application for drawing contempt proceedings against his client was "nothing but a fiction".

"He [Jalal] has no connection whatsoever with the story," said Rashid, adding, "The opposite party [Jalal] is ready to face any enquiry or investigation so that whoever is involved in this serious crime against the learned advocate is brought to justice."

Rashid said Jalal was an

"important witness" in the cases against Mojaheed, Motiur Rahman Nizami, Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman Khan. "The application filed by the learned advocate containing a fictitious plot could be a strategic plan to discredit him in some way."

He also prayed for exonerating Jalal from the charge.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam fixed July 11 to hear the petitioner's reply in this regard.

Meanwhile, the tribunal completed recording testimony and cross-examination of the 28th and 29th prosecution witnesses in the case against war crimes accused Abdul Alim.

Amena Khatun and AKM Mominul Islam, two employees of the Liberation War Museum, gave their testimonies as the second and third seizure-list witnesses.

They exhibited a report on the findings of the People Inquiry Commission on the activities of the war criminals and the collaborators, which was seized by the investigation officer of the case from the museum during investigation.

Alim's lawyer Ahsanul Huq Hena had completed the cross-examination before the tribunal adjourned the case proceedings until today.

Alim, a former member of late president Ziaur Rahman's cabinet, was indicted on 17 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide committed during the Liberation War.

Home ministry ignored

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2011 on a suo moto move. Mizanur's statement was sent to the press after different media ran news he had proposed that Limon withdraw the case his mother had filed against officials of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

He also made requests to the ministry through three letters dated April 4, 2012, July 11, 2012 and May 30, 2013 to withdraw the cases filed against Limon before completion of his first term as chairman of the commission, the letter read.

The NHRC chief also said he had reminded the ministry to send the probe report on a number of occasions, and requested the minister in person to submit reports on such issues of human rights violation.

After Limon was shot in his left leg by a Rab team on March 23, 2011, the home ministry assigned a one-member probe committee of M o h a m m a d S h a w k a t Akbar, additional divisional

commissioner of Barisal, to investigate the matter.

The probe report, submitted to the home ministry on June 6, 2011, said Limon became a victim of a shootout between Rab personnel and a local notorious criminal gang leader Morshed Jamadar on March 23.

However, the report never reached the NHRC, Mizanur Rahman told The Daily Star over the phone.

CQK Mustaq Ahmed, senior secretary of the home ministry, said "We have always cooperated with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). If they had sent such letters, there is no reason why we would not respond to those."

Ahmed told this correspondent to contact Dr Kamal Uddin Ahmed, additional secretary of the home ministry, regarding the NHRC letter.

Contacted over the phone, Dr Kamal said, "I cannot recall anything regarding this issue. Since the letter was sent some-

time ago, I have to go to the office and check (whether the ministry had received the letter)."

He also said, "Without going through the content of the (probe) report, the NHRC cannot decide its next course of action (regarding Limon's case)."

Based on the findings of the probe report published in different newspapers, he sent DO letters to the ministry to withdraw cases against Limon, he claimed.

"His [Limon] innocence was proved through a number of different sources," he added.

Following the "shootout" on March 23, 2011, Rab had filed false cases against Limon on charges of possessing firearms and obstructing law enforcers in discharging their duties.

In April that year, Limon's mother Henowara Begum sued six Rab officials on the charge of an attempt to murder.

City polls show people want change

Says Khaleda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though BNP-backed mayoral candidates have won in the recent city corporation polls, the opposition will not move an inch from its demand for a caretaker government, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said yesterday.

People of the country wanted a "change" and that was reflected in the results of the Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and Rajshahi city corporation elections held on June 15, she said.

Khaleda made these remarks while talking to party leaders and activists during Barisal City Corporation mayor-elect Ahsan Habib Kamal's visit to her Gulshan office last night.

The ruling Awami League has been hatching a conspiracy centring on the upcoming Gazipur City Corporation election scheduled for July 6 and has sent there a goon from Bhola. As Khaleda said this, her party members sitting beside her shouted out Awami League lawmaker Nurunabi Chowdhury Shaon's name.

Khaleda asked the partymen to get prepared for agitation for a caretaker government to oversee the next parliamentary elections.

"We are happy but not satisfied. The elections to the four city corporations were not fair and transparent. Had the elections been held fairly and neutrally, the ruling Awami League-backed candidates would have lost their deposits."

Citing the crackdown on Hefajat-e-Islam activists on May 5, she alleged the government had used firearms against them during the rally at Shapla Chatter in the capital's Motijheel.

Regarding the Padma bridge project, she said that due to the corruption of the ruling party high ups, the World Bank had withdrawn its funding. The government has decided to implement the project by its own funds but that will affect other development projects, she added.

PCJSS leader shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Criminals shot dead a leader of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti near Panchhari upazila health complex under Khagrachhari district on Saturday night.

Police said an armed gang ambushed Supan Chakma, 40, general secretary of the MN Larma faction of PCJSS around 8:30pm, just as he had parked his motorcycle in front of the complex on his way back home.

Panchhari Police Station Officer-in-charge Alamgir Hossain said Supan received at least 15 to 18 bullets to the left of his chest.

Supan was taken to the Khagrachhari Adhunik Sadar Hospital by locals and family members after he was declared dead by the health complex duty doctor.

"The filing of a case in this regard is being processed. The body of the deceased was handed over to family members yesterday morning, after a complete autopsy was performed at the Khagrachhari Adhunik Sadar Hospital," said the OC.

General Secretary of Khagrachhari district unit of the PCJSS MN Larma faction Bivhuranjan Chakma blamed the cadres of PCJSS Shantu Larma faction for the murder.

Contacted with the Press and Information Secretary of the PCJSS Shantu Larma faction, Mangal Kumar Chakma denied all allegations of his men being involved in any way with the killing.

Cloning to create UK's 'super trees'

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makes sense to use the largest, oldest, most iconic trees with their supergenes. These trees, which can be 1,000 years or older, have weathered the industrial age and all the climate changes. They have proved that they can take everything. When you clone, you get 100% identical genetics, the whole lineage."

Milarch, who is backed by the Eden project founder Sir Tim Smit and Sir Richard Branson, is in Britain this week for talks with specialists on ancient trees and Prince Charles's forestry experts. He expects to draw up a list of Britain's "super-trees" in the next few weeks and start cloning this summer.

Eventually he hopes to establish a complete archive of all Britain's most important trees, which would be made publicly available.

The practice of producing genetically identical copies of trees is not new. Typically, the tips of branches are cut, dipped into a rooting hormone and then fed and kept warm. The stem cuttings go on to form roots and the new plant is genetically identical to the plant that the cutting came from.

But, in practice, it has proved nearly impossible to clone some of the world's botanical behemoths. "It can take 1,000 pieces of plant to get two or three to root," said Milarch, head of a fourth-

generation tree nursery group in Michigan. "It might take 5,000 pieces. We needed 15,000 attempts to get three clones from one redwood. All we need is one to root, one to grow, one to take off."

"Everyone has said that you cannot clone old oaks. But we now have all 22 of the great oaks of Ireland cloned. No one had ever been able to clone with 1,000-year-old trees, but we can now do it. We could produce millions of [any one] tree in a year."

So far, Milarch and his conservation organisation Archangel have successfully cloned 75 species, including redwoods, giant sequoias, Monterey cypresses and the

Monterey pine. They have also cloned the Methuselah bristlecone pine, thought to be the oldest tree in the world at 4,845 years old.

Last year he successfully cloned the Fieldbrook Stump, the remains of the largest coastal redwood that has ever lived with a diameter of 9.8m (32ft) which may have soared to more than 40 storeys high before it was felled 130 years ago.

Only a small number of tree species have the genetic capacity to grow to a great size, but little is known about why some trees live far longer than others, or how much their growth is determined by the broader environment in which they grow.