

Shocking shelters

Unfit cyclone homes in Patuakhali await disaster

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The dearth of a required number of cyclone shelters coupled with the dilapidated conditions of the existing ones poses a threat to the people of Patuakhali people during the cyclone-prone season between May and October.

People in the district still reel from the shock and pain that they had to endure as a result of cyclone "Mahasen", which hit the Bangladesh coast on May 16. It, however, left no serious destruction.

Being asked by the local administration to move to safer places, thousands of coastal people in the district rushed to cyclone shelters for safety on May 15.

But the cyclone centres were not enough to accommodate these people. Moreover, the existing ones remained in such dilapidated conditions that they did not dare to enter those buildings.

Fazlur Rahman, chairman of Chalitabunia union in Rangabali upazila, said there were three cyclone shelters that could at best accommodate around 4,000 people, whereas the union has around 27,000 people.

He demanded at least five more cyclone shelters for the people in the union.

The condition of different upazilas in the district is also the same as no significant measures either to construct new cyclone shelters or to repair the dilapidated ones have so far been taken.

Abdul Haque of Arojbagey village under Dashmina upazila in the district, who lost all 12 members of his family in the 1970 cyclone, said, "We pass our days in anxiety during the season from May to October, as cyclone shelters are not sufficient here."

Shanti Ranjan Baidya, district relief and rehabilitation officer in Patuakhali, said there were 322 cyclone shelters in eight upazilas of the district which could not give shelter to a large number of people.

Twenty-four of them were also useless as they had been in dilapidated conditions for long, he added.

The 1,297 cyclone shelters in Patuakhali, Barguna and Bhola districts can hardly accommodate around 20 lakh people, whereas the population there is around 47 lakh, according to the officials of the relief and rehabilitation offices in the districts.

As a result, a very large number of people in the districts, mostly living in around 500 chars, fall easy prey to various natural disasters in the absence of a required number of cyclone shelters.



Lack of maintenance and repair has reduced these Patuakhali cyclone shelters, last hope of coastal people when storm hits, to skeletal structures. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Minister's rally

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workers who vandalised factories and blocked roads and highways (STORY ON B1).

He said the 20 percent rise in basic salary, or the increase in minimum wage to Tk 3,600 from Tk 3,000, as proposed by the owners, is too low to improve the living standards of the garment workers, and called for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's intervention.

The workers' representative on the wage board called for a minimum wage of Tk 8,114 per month.

The minister also said at the rally, "It is unjust that the owners sack you [the workers] for the slightest of offences. This should not be the case."

He went on to say he would do "whatever needed" for the garment sector to flourish.

"Some people are lying against me; they are trying to destroy my image. This has to stop. I have always worked for the workers and I will continue to do so."

He also came down heavily on Ahmed Shafi, chief of Islamist group Hefajat-e Islam, for his recent derogatory comments about women, particularly those working in the garment sector.

This, however, is not the first time that the shipping minister has run into a spot of controversy.

Other than his ministerial duties concerning one of the modes of transport in the country, he is a leader of the transport workers' federation and the owner of a transport company.

Shajahan has allegations of extortion against him, and at the same time, he serves as an adviser to the government's road transportation and road safety councils.

The minister could not be reached despite several attempts.

'Cantonment' on Buriganga river

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demarcation pillars, tree plantation and walkways.

The Dhaka District Administration a decade ago first leased out 25.5 acres of foreshore area to army upon approval from the land ministry's central land allocation committee.

Official sources said BIWTA's objection to this lease had been ignored.

In 2010, it again initiated to lease out 1.5 acres of foreshore of the same site. The process is now near completion.

Leasing out and filling up foreshores is a blatant violation of the HC order, said Islam.

In February 2003, the cabinet decided not to acquire or lease out the Buriganga foreshores to keep the river's navigability and natural flow unharmed.

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PM flies to NY today

FROM PAGE 16
Ban Ki-moon.

An Emirates flight carrying the PM and her entourage will leave Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 9:30pm.

On the way, she will have a

The latest move to lease out foreshore of the river also overrules the cabinet decision.

The leased out foreshore had been recorded as khas land in CS and SA records but was dubiously recorded as private property in the RS records and city survey.

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Cabinet to decide army job today

FROM PAGE 16
Besides, the army team will take help from experts of the Bureau of Research and Testing Consultancy of Buet.

Officials at the Bridges Division said Buet experts would be given fees from the total amount as per Buet policy.

The three packages to be overseen by the army are Janjira Approach Roads and Selected Bridge End Facilities, Mawa Approach Road and

Selected Bridge End Facilities, and Service Area, according to the Bridges Division proposal.

However, an international firm will be appointed as supervision consultant for the construction of the main bridge and river training.

An official at the Bridges Division said a fresh tender had already been floated for appointing an international firm.

The appointment of con-

(DC) of Dhaka Shaikh Yusuf Harun said, "Pillars are not the Bible, and most of them have been installed on private land."

"The leased out area is neither a river nor any foreshore," he claimed.

The DC's claim is puzzling because foreshores are khas land and integral part of the river under the laws.

As per the definition given in the port act and rules, the leased out area is part of the foreshores and is part of Dhaka river port as declared in an official gazette.

The district administration cannot lease it out for any purpose, said Monowar Hossain, a recently retired BIWTA secretary, adding that in case there was any private property there, it was government's duty to acquire

and hand those over to the port conservator.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan said his ministry would hold a meeting with the defence ministry on the issue. "Let's see what we can do. The lease can be cancelled if needed," he said.

The Daily Star on September 10 wrote to the Inter Service Public Relations Directorate inquiring whether the army was planning to set up a cantonment at the site and if so, of what kind and why they required river foreshore.

With no response after seven office days, the newspaper contacted ISPR Director Md Shaheenul Islam and he said, "We have forwarded the letter to the army. But they are busy ... let's see ... I will enquire about it."

DNA report next month

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of Investigation (FBI) visited the lab on the day.

The FBI team brought "Combined DNA Index System (CODIS)" software, which has a capacity to compare and match around two million DNA data at a time.

The US government provided the software to Bangladesh free of cost through a bilateral agreement between these two countries.

The other two Asian countries currently using this software worth around Tk 1 crore are Singapore and South Korea.

"The software is not sold commercially. It is only given to countries through bilateral agreement," Akhteruzzaman added.

Rana Plaza, a building that housed five garments

factories in Savar on the outskirts of the capital, collapsed on April 24. About 1,132 people died, hundreds of others became disabled, and many went missing in the tragedy.

According to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Savar, Kamrul Hasan Mollah, the estimated number of missing victims as per the list drawn up after the completion of the rescue operation on May 14 stood at 321.

According to the NFDPL, DNA samples of 321 dead bodies and blood samples of 555 close relatives of the victims, who reported that their dear ones went missing in the accident, had been collected.

A source at the lab told The Daily Star that decalcification, extraction

and analysis of the Rana Plaza DNA samples was complete. "We will just input the data, and the software will help the comparing process."

The FBI team would also provide lab officials with training for three to four days on the use of the software, Akhteruzzaman said.

Following the Rana Plaza disaster, Prof Akhteruzzaman repeatedly mentioned that the software the NFDPL was using then was not advanced enough to compare the huge number of DNA data.

After the Tazreen fire accident on November 24 last year, DNA samples of 59 bodies and blood samples of 47 close relatives were collected by the lab. But 12 bodies remain unidentified till date.

Syria hands over list

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United States -- have been wrangling over the text of the resolution since Monday in a bid to find common ground.

The United States, France and Britain want a strongly worded resolution, possibly under the UN Charter's Chapter VII, which could allow the use of force or sanctions to ensure compliance.

However Russia, a key ally of Damascus, opposes all references to use of force.

The Syrian opposition National Coalition meanwhile rejected an offer from Iranian President Hassan Rohani for Tehran to mediate talks between rebels and the regime.

"The Iranian initiative is not serious and lacks political credibility," the key opposition grouping said in a statement, pointing to

Tehran's close ties to Assad's government.

Rohani, a moderate on Iran's political scene, has made several diplomatic overtures since his election in June, and there has been speculation that he could also meet US President Barack Obama at the United Nations next week.

The chemical weapons disarmament deal has done little to slow fighting on the ground, with the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reporting that regime troops killed 15 people in a Sunni village in the central province of Hama late on Friday.

The Observatory said regime troops backed by Alawite pro-regime militias killed 12 men, two women and a child in the village of Sheikh Hadid.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is from the Alawite religious minority and faces an uprising that is dominated by Sunnis.

Elsewhere in the country, the Observatory said rebel groups carried out prisoner exchanges under the terms of a deal to end fighting over the town of Azaz, near the border with Turkey.

The truce deal between the mainstream Free Syrian Army and the al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was brokered by a third brigade which is overseeing the ceasefire.

Tensions have spiralled between some mainstream rebel groups and ISIS in recent months, especially in northern Syria, where the opposition controls vast swathes of territory.

US nearly detonated atomic bomb

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its parachute opened, its trigger mechanisms engaged, and only one low-voltage switch prevented untold carnage.

Each bomb carried a payload of 4 megatons -- the equivalent of 4 million tons of TNT explosive. Had the device detonated, lethal fallout could have been deposited over Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and as far north as New York city -- putting millions of lives at risk.

Though there has been persistent speculation about how narrow the Goldsboro escape was, the US government has repeatedly publicly denied that its nuclear arsenal has ever put Americans' lives in jeopardy through safety flaws. But in the newly-published document, a senior engineer in the Sandia national laboratories responsible for the mechanical safety of nuclear

weapons concludes that "one simple, dynamo-technology, low voltage switch stood between the United States and a major catastrophe".

Writing eight years after the accident, Parker F Jones found that the bombs that dropped over North Carolina, just three days after John F Kennedy made his inaugural address as president, were inadequate in their safety controls and that the final switch that prevented the disaster could easily have been shorted by an electrical jolt, leading to a nuclear burst. "It would have been bad news -- in spades," he wrote.

Jones dryly entitled his secret report "Goldsboro Revisited: How I Learned to Mistrust the H-Bomb" -- a quip on Stanley Kubrick's 1964 satirical film about nuclear holocaust, Dr Strangelove or:

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.

The accident happened when a B-52 bomber got into trouble, having embarked from Seymour Johnson Air Force base in Goldsboro for a routine flight along the East Coast. As it went into a tailspin, the hydrogen bombs it was carrying became separated. One fell into a field near Faro, North Carolina, its parachute draped in the branches of a tree; the other plummeted into a meadow off Big Daddy's Road.

Jones found that of the four safety mechanisms in the Faro bomb, designed to prevent unintended detonation, three failed to operate properly. When the bomb hit the ground, a firing signal was sent to the nuclear core of the device, and it was only that final, highly vulnerable switch that averted

calamity. "The MK 39 Mod 2 bomb did not possess adequate safety for the airborne alert role in the B-52," Jones concludes.

The document was uncovered by Schlosser as part of his research into his new book on the nuclear arms race, Command and Control. Using freedom of information, he discovered that at least 700 "significant" accidents and incidents involving 1,250 nuclear weapons were recorded between 1950 and 1968 alone.

"The US government has consistently tried to withhold information from the American people in order to prevent questions being asked about our nuclear weapons policy," he said. "We were told there was no possibility of these weapons accidentally detonating, yet here's one that very nearly did."

MDG Goals

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Post-2015 Issues. It was jointly organised by CPD and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung -- a foundation of the Social Democratic Party of Germany -- office in Bangladesh, at the Brac Centre Inn in the capital yesterday.

"Bangladesh, however, is off-track in two areas: proportion of land area covered by forests and employment to population ratio, where the situations have deteriorated since 1990," said Debapriya during the presentation.

Bhutan came third in the Country Ranking based on the MDG Index, while Rwanda secured the fourth place. Mali and Nepal took the fifth position jointly.

The report said that four African countries were at the bottom of the list.

The study also revealed that 46 out of the 49 LDCs will achieve at least one target among the 14 indica-

tors. Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Somalia are unlikely to meet any of the targets.

Bangladesh is likely to meet targets in proportion to population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption, net enrolment ratio in primary education, ratios of girls to boys in primary education, under-five mortality rate, infant mortality rate, proportion of one-year-old children immunised against measles, maternal mortality ratio and HIV prevalence among population aged 15-24 years.

The four other areas where the country has made substantial progress are: proportion of population below poverty line, literacy rate of 15 to 24-year olds (men and women), proportion of population using an improved drinking water source, and proportion of population using improved sanitation facilities.

War trial

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When Frost referred to the criticism that those who were condemned to death are senior leaders of opposition parties, the PM said, "Law will take its own course. Those who lost their family members, it is their demand that these criminals should be punished."

She maintained that the trial was one of the key election pledges of Awami League. "If you don't try these people, you cannot move forward, because it is just like a curse to the nation."

To a question from Frost, who died later on August 31, Hasina observed that whether she would win the next general elections was up to the people. "If they are satisfied, if they vote for me, I'll come."

Hasina insisted that she wanted to ensure the voting and constitutional rights of people, saying, "They get all the chance to vote freely and fairly and choose their own

government."

Referring to the last face-to-face conversation between Hasina and her rival Khaleda Zia years ago, Frost asked if she could ever work with Khaleda seriously again, or if she would ever work with her.

To this Hasina said, "We have ideological differences." Claiming that her party had been established to ensure people's rights and that they believed in democracy, she said there were killings, conspiracies and manipulation every time there was a local election or by-election in BNP's term. "So, there is a basic difference."

Asked who were to blame for disasters like the Rana Plaza building collapse, the PM said the responsibility to ensure safety lies with everybody.

If the buyers pay more, owners of garment factories could house their units in better buildings, she said, terming the disaster a "wake up call for everyone".