



Members of a family at Dowani village of Hatibandha upazila under Lalmonirhat district leave their house for a safe shelter, and below, people wade through knee-deep water at Chhotokhata village in Khalisha Chapani union of Dimla upazila under Nilphamari district yesterday as flash floods triggered by the sudden rise of water in the Teesta River inundated large areas in the two districts since Wednesday evening.

TEESTA FLOWS ABOVE DANGER LEVEL

30 thousand marooned in Lamonirhat, Nilphamari

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Flash floods triggered by sudden onrush of water from the upstream across the border marooned at least 30 thousand people in Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat districts in last two days.

Water from the upstream started rushing into Bangladesh areas on Wednesday night as the Indian authorities opened all the gates of their Gajaldoba Barrage, situated in the upstream of Bangladesh's Teesta Barrage in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat, to release 'excess' water, reports our Lalmonirhat correspondent.

The Teesta River was flowing 35 centimetres above the danger level at Teesta Barrage point yesterday morning, Water Development Board (WDB) officials said, adding that at least 20 thousand people of five thousand families were marooned in 30 villages of Patgram, Hatibandha and Kaliganj upazilas under Lalmonirhat district.

At least 45 houses at Teesta char villages Gaddimari, Saniazan, Dowani and Dawabari were washed away due to sudden onrush of water from the upstream, local sources said.

The flood affected unions are Dahagram, Kuchlibari of Patgram upazila, Gaddimari, Saniazan, dawabari, Sindurna of Hatibandha

upazila, Bhotmari of Kaliganj upazila in Lalmonirhat, WDB sources said.

"Many people went to safe shelters after the WDB officials arranged announcement through loudspeakers to warn us of the flash flood on Wednesday night," said Soleman Ali, 55, a resident at Teesta River basin char Gaddimari village in Hatibandha upazila.

"The Teesta water started receding in its northern part today [Thursday] afternoon and so, the people living in the downstream of the Teesta Barrage may face flash flood," said Mostafizur Rahman, executive engineer of WDB at Dalia office.

Our Nilphamari Correspondent reports: At least 10,000 people have become marooned in low lying areas of Dimla and Jaldhaka upazilas under the district as swelling Teesta River caused flash flood there from Wednesday evening.

The Teesta was flowing 35 centimetres above the danger mark at Dalia barrage point in yesterday afternoon, said Fazlul Huque, sub divisional engineer of WDB at Dalia in Nilphamari district.

The huge current damaged about 100 metre portion of the embankment on the Teesta River at Dauabari village

in Jaldhaka upazila and WDB men are trying hard to save the embankment by putting concrete blocks and sandbags, said sources.

Most affected villages are Purbo Kharibari, Char Kharibari, Kisamot Chhatnai, Doholpara, Baishpukur, Bhasanir Char, Fakrater Char, Jharshinherswar, and Bhendabari villages of Dimla upazila and Bhaban Chur and Gopal Jhar, Dauabari, Jhunaghachh Chapani, Golmunda, Sholmari and Koimari of Jaldhaka upazila.

The marooned people are suffering from want of food and drinking water.

Agriculture officials of Dimla and Jaldhaka upazilas informed that 500 hectares of maize, paddy and vegetable fields and aman seedbeds have become affected by the flood.

Mostafizur Rahman, executive engineer of WDB at Dalia, said they arranged announcements through loudspeakers, asking people to move to safer places as the flooding by the Teesta turned alarming.

"We have asked the union parishad chairmen of the flooded areas to prepare lists of the affected people to provide them food and other support," said Tajul Islam, district relief and rehabilitation officer.

Domar-Chilahati-Muktirhat road in awful condition

Demanding repair, locals form human chain, plant paddy on the muddy road

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Locals formed a human chain in front of Maya Cinema Hall in Domar municipality yesterday demanding early steps to repair 26-kilometre-long Domar-Chilahati-Muktirhat road near the border areas under the district.

The commercially impor-

tant road, also used by Border Guard Bangladesh for movement to and from different bordering camps, has become almost unfit for vehicular movement due to lack of repair or renovation for long.

People of Domar municipality under the banner of Citizens' Unity have continued agitation for a week and even planted paddy saplings

on the muddy road to press for their demand.

Visiting the road on Wednesday, this correspondent saw a number of pot-holes on the road that has become muddy at places.

Some of the most vulnerable points of the road are in front of Maya Cinema Hall in Domar municipality and at Mahiganj, Dhonchonpur,

Joradhigi, Purarhat, Mirjaganj Haat, Jharpara, Chandokhana, Kazirhat, and Botolganj.

"Accidents occur almost regularly. A good number of vehicles have already stopped operation on this route to avoid frequent damage of vehicles," said Shahjahan Choudhury, president of district bus and truck owners group.

Seven people were injured as a loaded truck bound for Chilahati rammmed a roadside restaurant when the driver lost control at about 10:00pm last Friday.

The road was constructed 20 years ago but no noticeable initiative was taken in last 15 years to repair or reconstruct it, locals said.

Contacted, executive engineer of Local Government Engineering Department in Nilphamari Huque Mahmud said, "The road needs repair as well as expansion on both sides as heavy vehicles move through it regularly. I have sent to the higher authorities a project proposal, assessing a tentative expenditure of Tk 10 crore. We hope to get it approved and start the work by early next fiscal year."



PHOTO: STAR

School kids walk amid difficulty on the rundown road in Domar municipality area in Nilphamari district and inset, locals plant paddy seedlings in the muddy road protesting the authorities' indifference to repair it. A large portion of the 26-kilometre-long important road stretching Domar-Chilahati-Muktirhat is in similar conditions due to lack of repair for long.



Cattle trader's bullet-hit body found

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) recovered the bullet-hit body of a cattle trader from the Padma River at Roghunathpur border in Shibganj upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased is Mohammad Ashraf, 40, son of late Altaf Hossain of Char Hasanpur village.

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) might have shot Ashraf dead in the border area while he was returning home from India, said Lt Col Abu Zafor Sheikh Mohammad Bazul Haque, commanding officer of BGB-9 Battalion.

Locals found the body floating in the river around 9:00am yesterday and informed the police.

The law enforcers rushed to the spot and recovered the body.

One killed over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two siblings hacked their uncle to death over a land dispute in Chuadanga district yesterday.

The dead was identified as Rahmat Ullah, 55 of Madna village in Damurhuda upazila under Chuadanga district.

Kamruzzaman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Damurhuda Police Station, said Rahmat Ullah had a long standing dispute with his nephews over a land.

They engaged in an altercation over the issue at around 4:30pm. At one stage, Rahmat nephews, Ainal and Faraz attacked him with sharp weapons.

The siblings also attacked Rahmat's wife Amena Khatun, 48, when she tried to save her husband.

Rahmat Ullah succumbed to injuries on way to Damurhuda upazila health complex at around 5:00pm.

75 return from Indian jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Seventy-five Bangladeshi women and children returned home through Benapole check post yesterday after serving three years in an Indian jail. Indian police handed them over to Benapole Immigration authorities.

Aslam Hossain, officer-in-charge Benapole Checkpost Immigration police, said a gang of human traffickers sent them, hailing from Narail, Bagerhat and Satkhira districts, to India promising them jobs three and a half years ago.

Later, they were arrested in Mumbai city by Indian police.

The Hindus of Hnila and their Kali temple

BY ANDREW EAGLE

North of Teknaf town, afternoon has reached sleepy Hnila's Old Bazar, a few hundred metres west of the Naf River. There's not much activity: most people are probably taking a rest after completing lunch.

We're sitting in a perennial building site that's half-flooded. It has planks of wood to balance across to venture inside. It's here the local Hindu community worship and a good number of them are gathered in the front of the building just beyond the gate. They've arranged plastic stools from somewhere to sit on. A fruit platter is being passed around.

"This is the southernmost Kali temple in Bangladesh," says community leader Bipul Pal. "It's the only Kali temple south of Cox's Bazar."

The Naf River is narrower in Hnila. On its far bank the periodic watchtowers of Myanmar are clearly visible, about the only evidence of

habitation along an otherwise wild bank. The common view of Myanmar to be heard in Teknaf's tea shops seems to ring true here: "Myanmar has lots of land," people say, "but little development."

The river wasn't always the border it is today. In the British period then Burma was like Bengal under British administration; and the Teknaf Peninsula was primarily inhabited by Buddhist Rakhines. Bengalis by all accounts were rare. Hindus were rarer.

"We are fifteen families," concludes Pal after a moment's mental count. "Hindu families in Hnila run simple businesses like dairies and tailoring shops." At least one fulfils an administrative role with an NGO. "None of us is rich."

The financial condition of the small community means that completing the refurbishment of the temple, in brick and on a grander scale than the original structure founded in

1833, will take time. Progress is slow.

Proud of their town, before evening there will be a tour of a handful of other temples, tin shed and dilapidated village constructions dedicated to other incarnations of God. At the Krishna temple there lives a solitary monk who teaches meditation and yoga. The temple keeps a cow and he offers fresh milk to visitors.

"What is important is what is in the heart," he says, "Islam says 'don't steal,' Buddhism says 'don't steal' and Hinduism says the same. If there is love for mankind in the heart it doesn't matter if you go to a temple, a church or a mosque. Some say paani, some say jol... There are many words for water."

As can be anticipated Hnila's Hindus revere all of the local temples but the historic Kali Temple is the community's focal point. "We don't know when we'll be able to finish its reconstruction," says Pal.



PHOTO: STAR

Hindu community people gather in front of the historic Kali temple at Hnila in Teknaf under Cox's Bazar district.

300 sued for attacking BGB men, looting smuggled goods

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday sued 300 people in two separate cases on charges of attacking a BGB patrol team and looting seized smuggled goods in Birampur upazila of the district on Tuesday.

Havilder Abul Bashar, camp commander of BGB 29 Battalion, filed a case with Birampur Police Station accusing 300 people on charge of preventing the border guards from performing their duties.

Of the accused, 89 were named while the rest unnamed.

Sadeq Ahmed, another

Havilder of the battalion, filed another case with the police station, accusing 50 to 60 unidentified people for looting the seized smuggled goods from an intercity train at Birampur Railway Station on Tuesday afternoon, said Md Amiruzzaman, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Earlier, on Tuesday, two people were killed and three others sustained bullet injuries as a BGB team opened fire on smugglers while they were raiding Birampur Railway Station.

Locals claimed that the deceased Mohammad Shahin, 28, and Mohammad Sultan, 24, of Colonypara in the upazila,

were innocent and used to run a tea stall in the station area.

Quoting witnesses, police said a team of the border guards raided Saidpur-bound "Rupsha Express" around 5:00pm and found illegally imported saris inside the train.

Later, a scuffle occurred between the smugglers and the BGB men when the latter tried to seize the saris and detain the criminals.

At one point, the smugglers attacked the BGB team and looted the seized goods, prompting the paramilitary to open fire, said Korban Ali, commanding officer of the BGB 29 Battalion.

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