

# Measures to avert cyclone damage were inadequate

TIB finds lack of adequate preparedness in 10 unions of 5 coastal dists when Roanu hit last year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anomalies in taking adequate measures to reduce risk of disaster before and after the cyclone Roanu were evident in 10 unions of five coastal districts, according to a report of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

The report, launched at a press conference at TIB's office in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday, says proper steps were not taken to repair risky flood protection embankments, polders and shelter centres in eight unions before the cyclone.

Some shelter centres in six unions became unusable during Roanu as those were not properly built due to irregularities and corruption, it says.

The number of wirelesses, vehicles and horn speakers to alarm locals beforehand were inadequate, while

drilling was not held regularly in all the 10 unions before the cyclone, it adds.

Instead of including the real affected people of some wards in seven unions in the list of beneficiaries, followers and supporters of local public representatives, who were not affected, were listed. Relatives and followers of union parishad chairmen and members were tasked with preparing lists in some wards of six unions, it adds.

The TIB in its research found that the people of five unions were given lesser quantity of rice during distribution. Besides, the affected people of eight unions did not get corrugated tin sheets, though the government authorities claimed to have distributed those.

At least 27 people died and thousands were affected when cyclone Roanu hit coastal areas of 15 districts on May 21, 2016.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

# 3 killed in 'shootouts'

2 of them robbers, one drug peddler, police say

STAR REPORT

Separate "gunfights" between police and alleged criminals left two "robbers" and a "drug dealer" dead in Rangpur and Magura early yesterday.

In Rangpur, two "robbers" -- identified as Moshir Rahman, 37, from Alampur under Taraganj upazila and Bijoy Chandra, 32, from Kursha-Boloram under Rangpur Sadar upazila -- died during a "gunbattle" that took place near Lengtiser Bridge on Dinajpur-Rangpur highway in Taraganj upazila.

According to police, they dispatched a team to the spot on information that a 10-member gang of highway robbers, including Moshir and Bijoy, were getting ready to rob passengers in vehicles on the highway.

As soon as they arrived at the scene around 3:00am, the gang started to retreat while firing gunshots at the law enforcers. The two "robbers" died on the spot as police also returned fire, said Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Taraganj Police Station.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

# Literature can keep children

FROM PAGE 1

Bangalee nation has been turned into a symbol of realising the rights of the people of the world who love their mother language.

She said UNESCO on November 17, 1999, recognised 21st February as the International Mother Language Day due to the initiatives of Canadian expatriates late Rafiqul Islam and Abdus Salam and sincere efforts of the then Awami League government.

Hasina remembered with deep gratitude late Rafiqul and late former education minister ASHK Sadique who were involved in the process of obtaining international recognition of the day.

She said Bangla Academy was founded on December 3, 1955, as a result of the Language Movement and the 21-point programme of the then Jukto Front government.

The PM reiterated that there would be no room for militancy and terrorism on Bangladesh's soil.

Bangla Academy Director General Shamsuzzaman Khan delivered the welcome speech at the inaugural function, with Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor in the chair.

Prof Dong You Chen, a Chinese

researcher and translator of Rabindranath Tagore's works, Austrian Manfred Kebo, Luz Maria Lopez from Puerto Rico, German writer Tobias Burghardt and Indian essayist Chinmoy Guha joined the inaugural function as the guests of honour.

At the beginning of the programme, a one-minute silence was observed as a mark of showing respect to the memory of the Language Movement martyrs.

"Nirbachita Prabandha", authored by the PM, "Ocean of Sorrow", a translation of noted novelist Mir Mosharraf Hossain's famous novel "Bishad Sindhu" and "Hundred Poems from Bangladesh", a compilation of Bangladeshi poems published from Germany in Swedish language, were handed over to the PM at the function.

Hasina also distributed the Bangla Academy Shahitya Puroshkar among the winners. Later, she visited some stalls at the book fair.

There will be a seminar on the main stage of the fair at 4:00pm every day from February 5-28.

Like the recent years, the fair venue has been extended to the nearby Suhrawardy Udyan. The authorities have allotted 663 stalls to 409 organi-

sations -- 114 in Bangla Academy ground and 549 at the Suhrawardy Udyan.

Besides, 15 pavilions have been allotted to 14 publishing houses, including Bangla Academy.

Strict security measures have been taken in and around the fair venue to avert any unpleasant incident.

Bangla Academy has organised the International Literature Conference to build a good bonding among local and foreign writers, poets, novelists as well as to create a platform to exchange their literary works.

The International Literature Conference Writers' Honorary Award will be given to six prominent personalities of Bangladesh on the second day of the fair.

The six personalities are National Professor Mustafa Nurul Islam, Language Movement veteran and researcher Ahmad Rafiq, emeritus professors Serajul Islam Choudhury, Anisuzzaman and Rafiqul Islam, and Prof Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir of Dhaka University.

A total of 27 foreign poets, writers, intellectuals from seven countries will join the conference.



## DISGUSTING

A picture has brought down outrage and condemnation over a school and a local chairman in Chandpur's Haimchar. People expressed anger at a photo in the social media that shows the local elected public representative walking over a "human bridge" formed by young students of the school. Chairman of Haimchar Upazila Parishad, Nur Hossain Patwary, who attended the annual sports event as chief guest at Nilkomal Osmania High School on January 30, said students formed a symbolic "human bridge" and he walked over their bodies on their insistence. He claimed awarding Tk 5,000 to the students. The school's headmaster, Mosharraf Hossain, claimed this has been practised in the school since 2002 and that the idea was conceived by his colleague and game teacher Prashanta Kumar Das. Das couldn't be contacted for comments. The headmaster also showed a file photo from 2004 where a UNO is seen walking over one such "human bridge" made by students back then.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

# UK parliament votes in favour of starting Brexit process

CNN ONLINE

The process of Britain leaving the European Union cleared a significant hurdle yesterday when members of the UK parliament voted in favor of allowing the government to begin divorce talks.

Members of the House of Commons voted by 498 to 114 to advance the bill that would give Prime Minister Theresa May the authority to invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty -- the formal process of leaving the EU.

The size of majority in favor of triggering Article 50 means the bill is almost certain to become law. But a battle is expected next week when the bill returns to the House of Commons for detailed scrutiny in the committee stage. Opposition parties will then try to push through a series of amendments.

The House of Lords, the UK's upper house, will also need to approve the Article 50 legislation before it can become law.

Triggering Article 50 gives the UK two years to negotiate a separation deal with the 27 other members of the EU. May has said she wants to fire the Brexit starting gun by the end of March.

The Prime Minister told the House of Commons that she would publish her detailed plan for Brexit in the form of a "white paper" on Thursday.

**DIVISIONS ON BOTH SIDES**  
The vote came after two days of debate that exposed divisions within the ruling Conservative party and the main opposition Labour party.

Former Labour Party leader Ed Miliband said he would support the measure but outlined major concerns over Brexit's impact on Britain's future global relationships -- particularly with the United States.

"I can go along with the Prime Minister that 'Brexit means Brexit,'" he said. "But I cannot go along with the idea that Brexit means Trump. And nor do I believe that is inevitable, and nor

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

# Red carpet

FROM PAGE 1

Nabil Abu Rudeineh and Adviser for Diplomatic Affairs Majdi AM Khalidi.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu, Commerce Minister Toifail Ahmed, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, LGRD Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shabriar Alam were present, among others, at the airport to receive the Palestinian president.

After the reception ceremony, Abbas left the airport for Le Meridien Dhaka, where he will stay during his visit to Bangladesh, said a foreign ministry source.

This is Abbas' first official visit to Bangladesh. In February last year, he made a brief stopover in the capital on his way to Japan from Jordan.

The Bangabhaban in a statement said Abbas flew to Bangladesh yesterday on an invitation by President Hamid.

The two countries are expected to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the formation of a joint commission at the foreign ministry level.

The Palestinian president is scheduled to visit the National Memorial in Savar this afternoon. He will place wreath there to show respect to the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for Bangladesh's independence in 1971.

He would also visit the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi to pay respect to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Abbas will make a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the afternoon.

Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad will have a meeting with the Palestine president.

In the evening, Abbas will hold a meeting with President Hamid at the Bangabhaban. Later, he would attend a cultural programme followed by a dinner hosted by Hamid at the Darbar Hall of the presidential palace.

The Palestinian president is scheduled to leave Dhaka tomorrow.

**FM MEETS ABBAS**  
Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali yesterday reiterated Bangladesh's stance on continuing its support to the cause of Palestine and expanding bilateral cooperation in days to come.

He made this statement during a courtesy call on the visiting Palestine President Mahmood Abbas at Hotel Le Meridien, said a press release.

"Bangladesh will continue to offer scholarships to the Palestinian students in medical and other disciplines as well as training opportunities to the Palestinian armed forces officials in Bangladesh," the foreign minister assured Abbas.



Former chief election commissioner Abu Hena talking to journalists after a meeting with the EC search committee members at the Supreme Court Judge's Lounge yesterday. On his right, Daily Samakal Editor Golam Sarwar, and behind him, renowned jurist Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud and The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam.

# 10-year-old girl

FROM PAGE 1

Flashes grew over ear and right leg knee. Frantically, Shahjahan took Shahana to a homeopathic doctor in late 2015.

The girl took medicines for a month, but nothing changed.

"I got totally frustrated. Meantime, a teacher and a local journalist told me to bring Shahana to Dhaka," the father said.

Shahjahan, a poor farmer, finally acted on that when he learnt treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) would be free of cost.

He borrowed Tk 650 from a relative and came to the hospital, the father said at the burn unit of DMCH where 10-year-old Shahana was admitted early this week.

"This appears to be similar to 'tree-man' disease that affected Abul Bajandar of Khulna," said Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator of burn services in Bangladesh.

Shahana is the first female who could have contracted the disease, he said.

A six-member medical board will be formed today to assess her illness, Samanta Lal said. "We will treat her free of cost."

Previously, Abul Bajandar, 26, was operated on at least 18 times at the hospital to remove bark-like warts from his limbs.

He has been suffering from epidermodysplasia verruciformis, a rare skin disorder commonly known as tree-man illness, which covers limbs with warts, making them look like tree branches.

Bajandar, believed to be the fourth man in the world with the illness, is expected to be fully cured. He needs four to five more surgeries, Samanta Lal said.

**SOCIAL STIGMA**

Meanwhile, Shahana has been unhappy about going to school in the last one year because, her father said, her classmates at Baluchara Government Primary School don't want to mingle with her.

That upset 35-year-old Shahjahan who saw his daughter grow up without her mother Nasima Begum after her death four years ago. Since then she has been raised by her grandmother Safia Khatun.

"When I went to school, some of my classmates didn't come close to me.

They said I had horns, which might spread to them," said Shahana, a student of class-III, at DMCH burn unit.

"Shahana is perfectly alright in learning lessons, sporting and even in work," her father told The Daily Star.

Now that doctors at DMCH assured him of treating her for free, he feels immensely relieved.

"I am hopeful that Shahana will be fine soon," Shahjahan said.

According to DermNet New Zealand, a resource about skin diseases, epidermodysplasia verruciformis (also called Levandowsky-Lutz dysplasia) is an extremely autosomal recessive inherited disorder. Till date, no cure has been found.

A Romanian man was first diagnosed with the disease in March 2007. Another case was reported in Indonesia in November that year in a 35-year-old fisherman.

The last reported case in 2009 also happened to be in Indonesia. The Indonesian fisherman died on January 30 last year from the complications related to his condition as the warts began to reappear. Those were surgically removed earlier.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

# EC must be free

FROM PAGE 1

"If we want to see an effective and independent Election Commission, the chief election commissioner and the commissioners should be competent, impartial, wise and conscientious people," he said.

Asked whether they discussed the already proposed names, he said, "We did not."

Lauding the panel's initiative to hold talks with civil society members, the former CEC said, "Such initiative should be continued in future."

Samakal Editor Golam Sarwar said the discussion was held in a friendly atmosphere.

"We believe the search committee will carry out its duty impartially. Those who harbour even the least opposition to the values of the Liberation War shouldn't be considered [for the EC posts]."

"We have trust in the committee, and believe it will propose the names of 10 competent persons," he said.

Sarwar said they were grateful to the panel for recognising the role of the civil society in the EC formation. The media also has a big role in this regard.

The opinions of the civil society members should be recorded and given to the next EC, he said.

He mentioned that during the discussion, they gave utmost importance to appointment of the CEC since he is the face of the commission. The EC would be less effective if the CEC softens up, he added.

Referring to the strong EC in India, he said, "We told them [the search panel] that the commission will have to be strong enough to face off any threat or pressure."

"And the age of the chosen persons must be below 70," he added.

Rokonuddin said the committee agreed that it would keep civil society members' suggestions in the introduction of its report on EC formation. If the panel picks persons who fulfill the criteria and they get appointed, it cannot be blamed for failure of any of the appointees to live up to the expectations, he noted.

The eminent jurist said the elections in 1996, 2001 and 2008 were exemplary because those were held under

the caretaker government system and there was no political interference.

"But this time the challenge is that the election would be held under a political government. This would be a challenge [for the EC]," he said.

"We don't know whether there would be political interference. But if that happens, the Election Commission has to overcome it."

Rokonuddin further said, "The most important thing here is who is going to be the chief election commissioner. He defines the character, he defines the power, he defines entire election ... He will carry out the whole thing."

The noted jurist firmly believed that the government would not interfere in affairs of the EC.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam said, "We think this Election Commission's responsibility is historically huge. Since the future of the country's democracy largely depends on a free and fair election, I think the search committee should have a vision. It will give the Election Commission some suggestions based on its wisdom."

The cabinet secretary, as in the past, should disclose the proposed names for the five EC posts soon after the committee submits the names to the cabinet division, he said.

Anam further said he has full confidence in the search committee, which is working sincerely to give its best recommendations.

After the meeting, Additional Cabinet Secretary Abdul Wadud said, "The civil society members have suggested picking those who have clean image, administrative skills, and the strength to carry out the duty."

Headed by Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, the search panel includes Justice Obaidul Hassan, a High Court judge; Muhammed Sadique, chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission; Masud Ahmed, comptroller and auditor general of Bangladesh; Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, trustee board member of Transparency International Bangladesh; and Shireen Akhter, province chancellor of Chittagong University.