



A school partially submerged in floodwater at Bhuapur upazila of Tangail. Around 170 schools and colleges in six upazilas have been closed as flood hit the district. Besides, seven primary schools have been devoured by river since last month. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Queues for relief getting longer

FROM PAGE 1

Around 200 families in the village got only two kgs of rice each yesterday.

The picture was almost similar in other flood-hit districts including Tangail, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Nilphamari and Sirajganj.

Scores of people were seen waiting in long queues for relief in many of the affected areas yesterday.

Contacted, Iftekharul Islam, director (relief) at the Department of Disaster Management, said, "We have been distributing relief materials in flood-hit districts since August 13. Most of the relief materials and money have been distributed."

In reply to a query, he said they were making the allocations primarily as per the demand from district administration.

The Tangail district administration said it got an allocation of only 15 tonnes of rice and Tk 2.5 lakh for 114,290 affected families.

Moniruzzaman Monir, chairman of Gabsara union parishad in badly-affected Bhuapur upazila, said "My entire union is hit hard by flood and at

FLOOD VICTIMS	
RICE DISTRIBUTED SO FAR	
Dinajpur	655 MT (1,55,700 families)
Kurigram	851 MT (1,17,302 families)
Lalmonirhat	242 MT (1,02,750 families)
Nilphamari	236 MT (42,000 families)
Sirajganj	547 MT (92,394 families)
Tangail	83 MT (114,290 families)

least 42,000 people are affected. But I have got an allocation of only two tonnes of rice."

Ayub Molla, chairman of Arjuna

union in the upazila, said he received only two tonnes of rice for the flood-hit people in his union.

"I started distributing it on Friday... the affected people immediately need dry food as they have no space to cook. They are also in urgent need of water purification tablets," he added.

In Lalmonirhat, 102,750 families have been affected in five upazilas. But only 242 tonnes of rice and Tk 8.75 lakh were allocated for the district.

Of the families, 24,200 got relief while the rest are yet to receive any government aid, according to sources in the district administration.

"We need two kgs of rice for our five-member family every day. But now we have to survive with one kg or less," said 42-year-old Nurjahan Begum at a temporary shelter near Lalmonirhat-Phulbari road.

"We don't have any money to buy food... We got only two packets of *khichri* from an NGO but nothing from the government," said her husband Kafil Uddin.

In Kurigram, the district adminis-

tration distributed 851 tonnes of rice and Tk 230,500 among 117,302 families till Thursday. This means each family got 7.25 kgs of rice and Tk 19.56.

The picture was similar in Sirajganj. The authorities distributed 547 tonnes of rice and Tk 14.40 lakh among 92,394 families in 391 villages with each family getting 5.9 kgs of rice and Tk 15.58.

In Nilphamari, 236 tonnes of rice and Tk 10 lakh were distributed among 42,000 families, meaning each family got 5.36 kgs of rice and Tk 23.80.

FLOOD SITUATION IMPROVES
The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre said the overall flood situation in country is improving.

The water level in the Brahmaputra and the Jamuna was falling, it said yesterday.

However, more areas in Madaripur were inundated as the Padma was flowing above the danger mark.

[Our correspondents from Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Pabna, Tangail, Gaibandha, Thakurgaon and Jamalpur contributed to this report]

Saying 'No' is a right too

FROM PAGE 1

threat to their freedom to nominate anybody in the election and second, that it wastes vote by not being counted for any of the candidate on the ballot.

It may be recalled nine years ago Bangladesh had given its citizens the right to cast the "no" vote.

Bangladeshis voters could vote "No" in the December 2008 parliamentary election. But the right was scrapped right next year, in February of 2009.

We were first among the citizens of the Saarc countries to exercise the right of "No" voting and 13th in the world.

Currently, India, France, Belgium, Brazil, Greece, Ukraine, Chile, Finland, Colombia, Spain and Sweden are among countries having the "No" vote in their electoral system.

Demand for restoration of the provision for "No" vote has been raised during the on going electoral talks by the Election Commission. The EC will decide on it after wrapping up talks with all political parties.

If we look back, we can see that it was not an easy task for the EC to make a difference through introduction of the "No" vote in 2008.

Major political parties had strongly opposed the EC's proposal for introduction of the "No" vote provision. Participating in the talks with the EC in 2007, and also in 2008, political parties had urged the EC to ignore the proposal.

But the EC-led by ATM Shamsul Huda stuck to its gun. In defence, it

had argued that casting "No" vote is one of the democratic rights. It gives voters an additional "choice" of rejecting the choice of the political parties.

The then caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed did not oppose the EC's proposal. Finally, the provision was introduced in August 2008, empowering the EC to hold re-election in a constituency where more than 50% of the voters rejected all candidates. They chose to vote "No".

However, the "No" vote provision did not have much effect in the December 29, 2008 parliamentary polls. Only around four lakh people voted "No" then.

But the Awami League, which assumed office through the December 29 election, did not like the provision. It abolished the "No" vote provision in February 2009.

It is a matter of interest to see what Bangladesh did in 2008, India, the world's largest democracy, has done in its 2014 election.

But it was not easy sailing for the Indian EC.

The Indian EC had also moved to introduce "No" vote in 2009. But it could not proceed with the idea due to the political parties' opposition.

It was the Indian Supreme Court that came up with a landmark verdict in September 2013 asking the EC to introduce the "No" vote provision.

The Indian SC was of the opinion negative voting would foster honesty and vibrancy in elections.

It added that democracy was all about choice and the right of citizens

to cast negative vote was of utmost significance. The apex court said the right to vote and the right to say "No" are both part of basic right of voters.

"For democracy to survive, it is essential that the best available men should be chosen... for proper governance of the country. This can be best achieved through men of high moral and ethical values who win the elections on a positive vote," said the Indian SC.

Thus the "No" vote option would indeed compel political parties to nominate sound candidates, it said.

The apex court further said giving right to a voter not to vote for any candidate while protecting his right of secrecy is extremely important in a democracy. "Such an option gives the voter the right to express his disapproval of the kind of candidates being put up by the parties."

"Gradually, there will be a systemic change and the parties will be forced to accept the will of the people and field candidates who are known for their integrity."

Not allowing a person to cast a negative vote would defeat the very freedom of expression and the right to liberty, said the court.

Following the court's order, the Indian EC introduced the "No" vote provision in the 2014 parliamentary election. More than 60 lakh voters chose to vote "No" that year.

India also introduced the "no vote" provision in state assembly elections in 2016. The 2016 Assembly elections saw some active canvassing for "no vote", which allows voters to

express their disapproval of all contestants.

In Kerala, a group of women activists hit the road urging people not to elect any candidate if no woman was present in the fray. In Tamil Nadu, a youth group campaigned for "no vote" as a protest vote against corruption, according to a report in the Hindu on February 28 this year.

Pakistan has been facing an uphill battle to introduce the provision since 2012. Its Supreme Court in 2012 in a verdict asked the EC to allow people to cast "No" vote.

The Pak EC had decided to introduce "No" vote in the 2013 election. But it had to back off from the decision in face of criticism by political parties.

In Bangladesh, there is still a debate over reintroduction of the provision for "No" vote.

The "No" vote can play a significant role to bring qualitative change in elections. If voters do not find any candidate in a constituency fit to vote for, they will not abstain from polling. They can exercise their right to franchise by casting "No" vote against all the candidates.

This will encourage people to get more involved in the electoral process. This practice, if introduced, will force political parties to nominate clean candidates in the elections.

Therefore, the provision of "No" vote can bring honest and competent people in elections who can improve quality of the parliament. And this will ultimately contribute to strengthen our democracy.

Floods affect 16m people

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needed to meet the growing needs of millions of people affected by these devastating floods," Martin Fallor, IFRC deputy regional director for Asia Pacific, said in the statement.

Millions of people across Nepal, Bangladesh and India face severe food shortages and disease caused by polluted flood waters, he said.

"More than one third of Bangladesh and Nepal have been flooded and we fear the humanitarian crisis will get worse in the days and weeks ahead," he added.

In Bangladesh, floods are likely to get much worse as swollen rivers from India pour into the low-lying and densely populated areas in the north and centre of the country. Over 3.9 million people have been affected by the rising flood waters.

In Nepal, villages and communities are stranded without food, water and electricity, read the statement.

"This tragic flooding in Nepal has claimed at least 128 lives and 33 people are still missing," said Dev Ratna Dhakhwa, secretary general, Nepal Red Cross Society.

India's meteorological department is forecasting more heavy rain for the region in the coming days.

Meanwhile, Unicef in Bangladesh has started providing initial support to flood affected people in addition to the ongoing preliminary rapid assessment, said a press release yesterday.

Citing the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, it said an estimated 3.9 million people in 20 districts were affected in the country.

As of August 14, 89 people have died. More than 282,400 people are living in 1,392 shelters in affected areas.

About 1,000 schools are closed while most rivers are flowing above the danger levels.

To accelerate immediate response on education, Unicef allocated \$90,000 for repairing schools in Mymensingh, Sylhet and Rangpur divisions. The fund will also be used to support district education authorities ensure temporary education arrangement for children in the shelters.

"Unicef will stand by the flood affected people and continue its emergency support in close collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh," Unicef Country Representative Edouard Beigbeder said in the press release.

Haor project put on ice

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Recently, Bangladesh Water Development Board, tasked with implementing the project, informed a planning ministry appraisal meeting that it could spend less than a fifth (Tk 138 crore or 19.6 percent) of the project money.

In its stipulated four-year term, the BWDB had spent 17.89 percent of the budget.

And this sorry state of the project comes to the fore at a time when the country's northeast region is bearing the brunt of a devastating flashfloods that struck very early into the pre-monsoon season (in late March), wiping out a million tonnes of unripe Boro rice.

Bangladesh's targeted Boro rice output was 1.9 crore tonnes this season. The crop loss threw out a challenge to the government, forcing it to go for rice import for the first time in six years.

At the August 8 appraisal meeting held in the capital, the Planning Commission noted that people living in the haor belt had to suffer losses following the flashfloods due to long delay in implementing the project -- titled "Pre-monsoon Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement in Haor Area".

With the project to protect the haor people progressing at a snail's pace, BWDB officials, at the meeting, sought a fresh extension till June 2019 for its implementation.

As questions were raised over the delay in project implementation, the officials came up with "excuses", saying they get a brief dry season (January-March) in the haor zone for doing the project's physical work, said meeting sources.

They also claimed that they did not receive funds as per the annual development programme's (ADP) financial allocations.

Although the project was supposed to build 39 drainage regulators, only 15 could be constructed while not a single of the 29 drainage outlets, 35 causeways and 22 irrigation inlets could be set up.

The project was supposed to re-excavate 333km of canals whereas in reality, work on little over 45km has been accomplished.

Of the 116km of river dredging work to be covered by the project, the BWDB could complete just 3.79km.

The project, however, has achieved a little better progress in construction and repair of embankments. Of 20 million cubic metres of submergible embankments, the BWDB worked on 9.6 million cubic metres.

Asked about the reasons behind the delay in project implementation, K M Anwar Hossain, who has been the project director since last June, said they were not receiving yearly funds properly.

He claimed that they lacked manpower for looking after the monitoring work and had limited time (January-

March) for the physical work as haor areas usually remain under water during the rest of the year.

Water Resources Ministry Joint Chief Montu Kumar Biswas, however, said funds were released based on requirements placed from the field.

Citing an example, he said the project in question could utilise just Tk 40 crore in the last fiscal year, against an allocation of Tk 100 crore.

Abu Bakar Siddiqui, an executive engineer working with the project, said 36 of 52 haor areas under the project were in Sunamganj.

He claimed that proper monitoring work was not possible in some remote areas due to a lack of manpower.

Abu Bakar also said project officials were transferred all too frequently, even before they could understand anything about the work.

Water resources ministry sources said the BWDB's chief engineer for Sylhet Division was ex-officio project director of the project.

A planning ministry official said the project had seen 11 project directors in the last six years.

The official, who wished not to be named, blamed the frequent change of the director for the delay in the project implementation, and said the officials tried to get themselves transferred through lobbying as they had to work in remote areas.

Such negligence by BWDB officials dealing with the fate of some 60 lakh haor people is not an isolated one.

Just five days before the August 8 appraisal meeting, some lawyers in the worst-hit Sunamganj sued 140 people, including BWDB officials and contractors, for their negligence and irregularities in construction of embankments that collapsed in flashfloods in April.

On July 2, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed a case with Sunamganj Model Police Station, accusing 61 people, including BWDB officials and contractors, of "purposeful mismanagement" and corruption in building dams in the district.

Local Jubo League leader Khairul Huda, one of the contractors, was arrested at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on this Wednesday.

Earlier, the anti-graft watchdog arrested suspended BWDB executive engineer Afsar Uddin and contractor Bachhu Mia in the capital's Motijheel area for irregularities in construction of dams in the same district.

The ACC also asked the government to take stern action against water resources secretary, BWDB director general and 14 other officials for "gross negligence in discharging their duties".

On May 2, three BWDB engineers were suspended over similar allegations.

SC verdict

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Passed in 2014, the 16th constitutional amendment had restored parliament's powers to remove Supreme Court judges for misconduct or incapacity. The High Court last year had declared the amendment illegal and the decision was upheld by the SC on July 3 this year.

The apex court released the full verdict in the case on Aug 1.

The AL general secretary assured flood victims that the government would stay beside them until they were rehabilitated.

"I am giving you the assurance that distribution of relief goods will continue, medical teams will continue working and the flood victims will be rehabilitated.... We'll always be beside you."

Quader said they came to flood-hit areas not to do a photo session, but to stay beside the victims like they did in

the past.

He said many BNP leaders visited the affected areas, but they "gave nothing" to the victims.

"The BNP leaders didn't go to haor and coastal areas. They went to hilly areas, but staged a drama and returned [to capital] midway through the tour."

The minister said BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir went to Saidpur and returned after "doing a photo session".

"Even after that, I want to express my thanks to Mirza Fakhrul as he came to his area and met the flood-hit people," he added.

AL advisory council member Satish Chandra Roy, Joint General Secretary Jahangir Kabir Nannak, organising secretaries BM Muzammel Haque and Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Relief and Social Welfare Affairs Secretary Sujit Roy Nandi and lawmaker Golam Mostafa (Nilphamari-3) were present.

Newly elected committee of Banglcraft



Ashrafur Rahman
President



Maqsood Ali
Sr. Vice President



Kazi Shahab Uddin
Vice President



ABM Helal
Treasurer

The President of Bangladesh Handicrafts Manufacturers and Exporters Association (Banglcraft) Mr. Ashrafur Rahman has been reelected without any contest. Maqsood Ali has been elected as Sr. Vice President. Kazi Shahab Uddin as Vice President and ABM Helal as Treasurer have been elected. The result of the election for the post of Office Bearers was announced on 12 August 2017 at the BTMC Office Building, Karwan Bazar, Dhaka.

The election for the Managing Committee of 18 members contested by two panels was held on 10 August 2017 at office of the association.

Teacher

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teacher's husband to a classroom and raped the teacher in another, locals added.

Contacted, Mamun-or-Rashid, officer-in-charge of Betagi Police Station, said the teacher got married around a year ago, but locals did not know her husband, who is an Indian national.

Asked, the OC said the accused were not involved with any political parties and that police were trying to arrest them.

"I want justice," the teacher told The Daily Star.

Her husband did not comment. Bijoy Basak, superintendent of Barguna police, visited the spot yesterday morning and talked to the couple.