



One of the many signs, put up by Rangamati district administration, cautions people of the danger of living in areas that the administration has marked as risky. PHOTO: ANVIL CHAKMA

2ND YEAR OF RANGAMATI LANDSLIDES TRAGEDY

Thousands still live in risk ignoring caution signs

ANVIL CHAKMA, Rangamati

Today marks the second anniversary of 120 lives perished in landslides across Rangamati in 2017. Since then, despite various awareness campaigns and evacuation drives by the district administration, at least 10,000 people are still living on 50 gorges and slopes of hills prone to further landslides, according to Rangamati district administration.

During the landslides on June 13 of 2017, as many as 1,200 houses were completely destroyed and 9,500 houses damaged partially, affecting around 18,000 families in Rangamati. Road communications between Rangamati and other districts remained collapsed for nearly 10 days, resulting in food and fuel shortage in a vast area of the district. The landslides also caused power outage for two days in the area.

Officials at Rangamati district administration said people are still not aware of the risks and many, including the ones affected by the previous landslides, are still living alongside the 50 hilly areas that the administration has marked as risky this year.

Monsoon downpour is yet to hit the hills of Rangamati and when the rains start to pour, it might turn fatal for the thousands who are reluctant to move elsewhere, they feared.

Mahammad Abdul Majid's dwelling was affected in a landslide last year in Shimultoli area of Rangamati municipality.

When asked why he still lives in the same place, he said no one wants to take the risk of dying in landslides after witnessing the deaths in the last couple of years. "The administration demolishes the houses built here, but where will go?"

In Rangamati municipality area alone, most of approximately 18,000 families live in areas susceptible to landslides, said sources.

During a visit to the town's Notun Para, Shimultoli, Pashchim Muslim Para and Rupnagar areas, where devastation was severe with many died during the landslides of June 13 in 2017, this correspondent came across several signs that the Rangamati district administration posted on top or on the edge of a number of hills. The signs read: "Beware of hill collapse and natural calamities - Risky area - Living and construction of structures prohibited."

However, no one apparently paid any heed to the cautionary signs as countless houses were seen on the gorges and the hillsides.

While speaking with this correspondent, SM Shafi Kamal, additional deputy commissioner (general) of Rangamati, said they believed that there will not be any deaths due to landslides in Rangamati this year because they recently conducted drives to dismantle houses built in risky areas.

Moreover, they were creating awareness among locals by putting up caution signs in 50 areas that they marked as risky.

"There's no scope of reconstruction of houses [after dismantling] in those hills. The district administration is in a tough stance against new houses in the risky areas," he said.

"At least 10 illegal houses were demolished by mobile courts in the last few months," he said, adding that they have taken elaborate preparations ahead of the upcoming rainy season.

As part of the preparations, they already distributed 30,000 brochures to people living in landslide-prone areas and teams of local volunteers, scouts, fire service, Border Guard Bangladesh and defence forces have been organised.

Elderly man beaten to death 'by nephews'

Three arrested; prime accused still on the loose

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

An elderly man was beaten to death in Netrakona on Tuesday when his nephews along with other family members of his elder brother allegedly attacked him during an altercation over a piece of land.

The incident took place in Bhawanipur village of Purbodhala upazila.

The deceased, Kutub Uddin, 65, retired as headteacher of a government primary school in the area.

Mohammad Towhidur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Purbadhala Police Station, said they arrested Tanni Akter, 15, Taslima Akter, 22, and Juena Begum, 65, in this connection the same night.

The deceased's wife, Anjuara Begum, filed a case with the police station yesterday against 16 people, mentioning Kutub Uddin's two nephews -- Mozammel Haque, 35, and Azizul Haque, 40 -- and his

brother, Mohammad Shamsuddin, 70, as prime accused.

A Netrakona court sent the arrestees to jail after they were produced before it yesterday, the OC said, adding that they were conducting drives to arrest the prime accused and others who fled the area after the incident.

Quoting locals and Kutub Uddin's family members, OC Towhidur said there had been a long-standing dispute over a piece of land with his brother and nephews.

On the day of the incident, the nephews and their men locked in an altercation with Kutub Uddin over the matter and at one stage, they beat him up with sticks, leaving him injured critically.

He was rushed to Netrakona General Hospital where the doctors pronounced him dead. Police later sent the body to morgue of the hospital for autopsy.

30 hurt in pre-poll clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

At least 30 people, including three policemen, were injured in a clash between supporters of Awami League-nominated chairman candidate and a 'rebel' candidate in Pearpur area of Madaripur Sadar upazila yesterday.

Police arrested 11 people in connection with the incident.

The fifth phase of the upazila parishad election will be held on June 18.

Kajal Krishna Dey, general secretary of Madaripur district unit of AL, got party nomination while Obaidur Rahman Khan, president of Madaripur District Bar Association and also a member of the upazila unit of AL, is taking part in the election as rebel candidate.

Police and locals said supporters of Obaidur attacked the men of Kajal when they were hanging posters of Kajal in the area around 7:00am.

Later, the two rival groups, equipped with lethal weapons, locked in an altercation over the issue, leaving at least 30 people, including three policemen, injured.

On information, police rushed to the spot and fired five rubber bullets to bring the situation under control, said Sirajul Haque Sardar, officer-in-charge of Madaripur Sadar Police Station.

Contacted, Kajal and Obaidur blamed each other for the attack.

Businessman shot dead in broad daylight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

A businessman was shot dead in broad daylight allegedly by a group of unidentified criminals in Bijoypur area of Natore's Lalpur upazila yesterday.

The dead is Alok Bagchi, 50, of Gopalpur municipality in Lalpur.

Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Lalpur Police Station, said a local van puller found Alok with bullet wounds around 3:00pm. He immediately took Alok to a local clinic. Later, doctors sent Alok to Lalpur Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

The reason behind Alok's murder could not be known immediately, said the OC.

Akramul Islam, additional superintendent of Natore police, said the criminals snatched Alok's motorbike after killing him.

Police are trying to detain the culprits, he added.

The victim's nephew Tanmoy Kumar demanded immediate arrest of his uncle's killers.

No case was lodged in this connection till 9:15pm yesterday.

Nalim cultivation gaining popularity

The melon variety fruit sees increasing commercial cultivation in Magura

SHYKH SERAJ

Slowly but steadily, nutritious and healthy foods are being included in the food menu of common people. Making it regular is now a matter of practice. Considering this, production of fruits, which are good for health, is also increasing. Farmers are now trying out new and diversified fruits and crops.

Cultivation of nalim, a melon variety fruit, is gaining popularity among the grassroots farmers in Magura. Over 155 hectares of land were brought under the production of nalim in the district this season. Hazipur, Mirzapur, Hazrapur, Narihati, Fulbari, Shibrapur and Mithapur are well-known for producing quality nalim in the district.

This has happened because farmers are getting more profit in a short time by cultivating nalim. Farmers say they are making around Tk 30,000 (approximately USD 355) profit from one bigha (approx 0.40 acre) of land. Many farmers are now getting into nalim cultivation. Last year, they did production on only 55 hectares.

As a whole, nalim has become quite beneficial to the local farmers of Magura. When I went to Magura Sadar upzaila, I found farmers working at the fields. The field was looking so bright and beautiful. I went there on May this year. Entering the field my memories took me to the foggy morning I had travelled to Daudkandi in Cumilla to the fields of melon many years ago.

Most of the farmers say the market is pretty good now. The festive scenario of picking nalim in the morning was very nice to see. In



A happy farmer at his nalim field in Magura. PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

fact farmers targeted the Ramadan market and they grew more and more nalim and profited much more than any other fruits in Magura. The same was with bangi (melon) in Cumilla this year. In Magura, it can be said that nalim is a cash crop.

Ukil Hossain, a nalim farmer, is growing plenty on his four bigha (approx 1.60 acres) of land.

"I have spent Tk 50,000 (approx USD 592) for production," says Ukil.

"How much will you earn, you guess?" I asked.

"At least Tk 1 lakh (approx USD 1185),"

he added.

Farmer Chanchal Jowardar has changed his fate by cultivating Nalim in the past few years. This year he has cultivated nalim on over nine bighas (approx 3.60 acres) of land. Chanchal believes he's going to make a great profit out of this land, full of nalims.

"How does it taste?" I asked another farmer.

"It tastes quite good," he answered.

I tasted it and it was really juicy and fresh, I can tell you. My body became very cool right after eating one slice of nalim.

I met a large-scale nalim farmer Abdus Salam who's been cultivating it for the past

seven years. On his nine and a half bigha of land (approx 3.80 acres) he has spent Tk 1.50 lakh (approx USD 1777) and expects to earn more than Tk 4 lakh (approx USD 4740). He has also been growing bananas, guavas, papayas and other fruits. Tarun Kazi started farming nalim on over three bigha (approx 1.20 acre) of land and with the money earned through the initiative, already he has expanded it on six bigha (approx 2.72 acres).

"What are you going to grow here after the harvest of nalim? I asked.

"I am going to plant gourds, pumpkin, radish, spinach and so on," Salam replied.

Farmers here in Magura are also using organic fertilizer to grow nalim which is really a great sign.

About 2,000 farmers are engaged in farming of the seasonal juicy fruit in Magura. This has happened also because nalim cultivation requires low cost and it is also a short-duration fruit, three months to be precise. Farmers here also send nalim to different districts due to its high demand.

Nalim farming is gaining popularity in Magura for its high production and profit, said officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension.

When farmers can produce the item at a low cost to earn more, they always try to fetch it. DAE is also providing seeds among the farmers to boost the production of nalim.

Dear readers, farmers know about high yielding crops and seasonal crops, and success in agriculture depends on their efforts, hard work and the use of modern technology.

Nalim farming of Magura shows a new

horizon, which can be adopted by farmers in other districts of the country. If the government organizations extend required support for the purpose, I am sure many small farmers would be able to earn with a very low cost. Such small initiatives will definitely turn big. We don't know what is in store for our farmers in the future and so, we must take these little chances to gain more, produce more quality and healthy fruits and crops which will definitely empower our farmers across the country. I also do hope that people would definitely think of a healthy and nutritious food like nalim in their food menu, of course following doctor's advice.

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is an Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.

Mobile bills may go up

FROM PAGE 1

in the fiscal year 2015-16 and increased the SD to 5 percent later.

Mobile phone is one of the biggest sources of revenue after cigarette and trade VAT, according to NBR's 2016-17 annual report.

Officials expect that this measure would increase revenue generation. However, industry insiders fear that it would discourage cell phones use.

Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer at Robi, said if tax is increased, it will directly affect users and ultimately lead to a gradual decline in overall phone usage.

"The government may think that they will get more revenue from this incremental tax, but in the long run, this will negatively impact on the government's revenue," he said.

There were 16.09 crore mobile connections in the country as of April this year, according to Bangladesh

Telecommunication Regulatory Commission.

Besides, to encourage owners of undisclosed money and inject the money into formal channel, the NBR is also likely to reduce specific tax on purchase of resi-dential buildings and flats in city corporations and district headquarters, said officials.

Now, taxmen accept investments in residential buildings and flats without questioning the source of fund, if anyone purchases houses paying Tk 700 to Tk 7,000 per square metre tax in city corporations and district headquarters.

A senior official said tax is planned to reduce, as responses from black money holders have so far been lukewarm since its introduction in 2013.

Realtors said people with undeclared wealth do not show interest in availing themselves of the opportunity, fearing that other agencies would question their sources of funds.

Myanmar broke its promises

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Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a repatriation deal in November 2017. But so far virtually no Rohingya have volunteered to return as the fear for their safety.

The refugees also argue that there is no guarantee that they would be given citizenship and allowed to return to their places of origin.

Amnesty International late last month accused Myanmar military of committing new "war crimes" in Rakhine as Myanmar military fights the Arakan army.

Abdul Momen said there were chances of some Rohingyas becoming radicalised while staying here amidst uncertainties.

"So, we will again stress that Myanmar sticks to its promises.

Please take back the people."

Referring to yesterday's meeting with diplomats, he said, "We have shared our position... They have said they are with us... Nobody believes in those statements [by Myanmar]."

"It's not only the Muslims, but the humanity is at stake in the way Myanmar is violating the rights of Rohingyas. If you have concern for humanity, you know how to create pressure on Myanmar."

US-BANGLADESH PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE

The US has committed to engaging the international community to mobilise additional assistance to put effective pressure on Myanmar for a resolution of the Rohingya crisis, according to a joint statement issued after a US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue held in Washington DC on June

10.

The event was co-chaired by Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque and US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale.

The countries acknowledged the continuing challenge of terrorism, and the importance of adhering to human rights obligations while advancing security objectives.

The US committed to providing additional security assistance for Bangladesh to increase maritime domain awareness, piracy, and regional security coordination in the Bay of Bengal, pending congressional approval.

The US also praised Bangladesh's impressive economic growth.

Bangladesh shared plans to facilitate foreign direct investment in support of infrastructure and energy projects and hoped that the creation of Special Economic Zones in the country would encourage more FDI from the US.

The US said it would continue to support the US private sector's involvement in Bangladesh while both countries expanded commercial ties through fair, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial trade.

Washington said it would continue to promote US business engagement in support of Bangladesh's development goals. It urged Bangladesh to continue its progress on labour rights and workplace safety in line with the ILO standards and practices in Bangladesh.